

# Why the Righteous Resist?

## Towards understanding Dietrich Bonhoeffer's resistance

By

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## **Abstract**

Although Bonhoeffer is hailed by some as a type of Protestant saint, there is certainly also a plea for the realisation of the paradox in his story; Bonhoeffer consciously associated himself with a plot against the life of another man. What led this young theologian, known for pacifistic ideals and full of promise, to participate in such a violent plot? How did Bonhoeffer, and the scholars who studied his life and work, justify his decision? How should we, as theologians and Christians in the twenty-first century, attempt to understand Bonhoeffer's resistance and its relevance for us today?

According to Bonhoeffer himself:

*"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its apologia for the weak. I feel that Christianity is rather doing too little in showing these points than too much. Christianity has adjusted itself to the worship of power. It should give much more offence, more shock to the world, than it is doing. Christianity should take a much more definite stand for the weak than to consider the potential moral right of the strong."* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 13, 2007:403)

By outlining the life of Bonhoeffer and selectively focusing on his resistance with both theological and sociological lenses, aided by his own writings, as well as the work of Bethge, Mataxas, Schlingensiepen, Rogers and an array of other authors, this thesis attempts to move towards understanding this remarkable man's steadfast struggle to not sit passively in the midst of the reign of the Third Reich in Germany and be blinded to the inhumane treatment of fellow Germans, regardless of their race or religion.

## **Afrikaans**

Alhoewel Bonhoeffer deur sommige as 'n soort Protestante heilige beskou word, is daar verseker ook 'n pleidooi vir die besef van die teenstrydigheid in sy verhaal; Bonhoeffer het homself bewustelik geassosieer met 'n komplot om die lewe van 'n ander man te beeindig. Wat het aanleiding gegee dat hierdie jong teoloog, bekend vir sy pasifistiese ideale en potensiaal, in so 'n gewelddadige komplot betrokke geraak het? Hoe het Bonhoeffer, en die geleerdes wat sy lewe en werk bestudeer het, sy besluit regverdig? Hoe sou ons, as teoloë en Christene in die een-en-twintigste eeu, Bonhoeffer se verset en die relevansie daarvan vir ons lewe vandag verstaan?

Bonhoeffer sê self:

*“Die Christendom staan of val met die revolusionêre protes teen geweld, willekeur en magstrots, en met sy voorspraak vir die swakkes. Ek voel dat die Christendom eerder te min as te veel doen om hierdie aspekte te weerspieël. Die Christendom het tot die aanbidding van mag aangepas. Dit moet baie meer aanstoot gee, die wêreld meer skok, as wat dit tans doen. Die Christendom moet 'n baie meer definitiewe standpunt vir die swakkes inneem, eerder as om die potensiële morele reg van die sterkes te beskerm.”*  
(Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 13, 2007:403)

Deur Bonhoeffer se lewe uit te lê en selektief, met beide teologiese en sosiologiese lense, op sy verset te fokus, bygestaan deur sy eie geskrifte, asook die werk van Bethge, Mataxas, Schlingensiepen, Rogers en 'n verskeidenheid ander outeurs, poog hierdie tesis om tot 'n verstaan te kom van hierdie merkwaardige man se standvastige stryd om nie slegs passief tydens die strikbewind van die Derde Ryk te

bly nie, maar ook om nie blind vir die onmenslike behandeling van mede-Duitsers  
nie, ongeag hulle ras of godsdiens, te wees nie.

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# INTRODUCTION:

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*“There are three possible ways in which the church can act toward the state: the first place, as has been said, it can ask the state whether its actions are legitimate and in accordance with character as state; i.e., it can throw the state back on its responsibility. Second, it can aid the victims of any ordering of society, even if they do not belong to the Christian community – ‘Do good to all people’. In both these courses of action, the church serves the free state in its free way, and at times when laws are changed the church may in no way withdraw itself from these two tasks. The third possibility is not just to bandage the victims under the wheel, but to jam a spoke in the wheel itself”*

(Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009:369)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer most certainly took his own advice, reaching out to jam a spoke in the wheel of the Nazi regime with the help of his fellow conspirators. He could not face the inhumane and horrifying actions of the holocaust in silence, but instead, driven by remarkably strong convictions, spoke for those who had no voice, and acted for those who lacked the ability to act on their own.

Upon the birth of the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the town of Breslau in 1906, no one could have known what an infamous German generation this little boy would one day form part of. Even less could it have been known what a dramatic end his life would come to 39 years later. Young Bonhoeffer entered the world before the concept of a ‘*World War*’ even truly existed; when he departed it, he was not yet seen as a hero. In due time however, he would be viewed and hailed by many as a type of Protestant saint.



Although Bonhoeffer came into conflict with a great array of individuals as well as institutions during his life and theological career, these collisions were all a product of his determined resistance against oppression and injustice.

Bonhoeffer lived out his convictions in the fray of the public realm. At present, there is a renewed emphasis on 'Public Theology' in theological discourse. In some ways, at least, he can be described as a public theologian and his life and thought also holds promise for thinking about the discourse on Public Theology today. Frits De Lange tackles the issue of Bonhoeffer's contribution and importance to Public Theology in an article titled '*Against escapism: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's contribution to Public Theology*' which he wrote for the Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology's '*Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and issues in Public Theology*' (2007). De Lange highlights that Bonhoeffer had an intriguing idea of what participation in the reality of God entails. He states that to Bonhoeffer;

*"the task of Christian ethics is asking how we can live 'in the reality of God'"*  
(De Lange 2007:145).

De Lange further refers to a passage Bonhoeffer wrote in '*Ethics*':

*"For the Christian there is nowhere to retreat from the world, neither externally nor into the inner life. Every attempt to evade the world will have to be paid for sooner or later with a sinful surrender to the world... In the eyes of a worldly observer, there is usually something tragicomic about the cultivation of a Christian inwardness undisturbed by the world; for the sharp-eyed world recognises itself most clearly at the very place where Christian inwardness, deceiving itself, dreams it is further away from the world"* (De Lange 2007:145).

From this passage, it is clear that to Bonhoeffer, his participation in the struggle against injustice (and thus his resistance of the Nazi regime and the evil that accompanied it) was more a duty he was expected to fulfil, based on his conviction concerning the role of the Church and thus, Christians, in this world, than a simple impulsive decision, guided by the circumstances he found himself in. Bonhoeffer's strong convictions in this regard are intriguing through the lens of Public theology.

Already in the introduction, De Lange identifies three claims to his argument, stating that Bonhoeffer's theology was, in the first place, an authentic theology, secondly, a dialogical theology and lastly, a theology that spoke of God in the midst of life (De Lange 2007:141). De Lange here elaborates on Bonhoeffer's theology, not merely as these three features thereof pertain to style, but to content as well.

In connection to his opening statements of the three exceptional features of Bonhoeffer's theology, De Lange notes that Bonhoeffer's theology was at no point simply abstracted from his personal life, but was, instead, deeply rooted in powerful Christian engagement. He states that it was not merely an "*isolated product of the interior monologue of an academic theologian*", but rather the result of an open process of questioning and response (De Lange 2007:141). He explains that Bonhoeffer:

*"asked believers to live a worldly life without the escape into what Bonhoeffer called religion"* (De Lange 2007:141).

The field of Public theology is one that investigates the participation of the Christian faith in public life. It is a very active field at present, with many hailed theologians contributing. In short, this field aims to consider Christian action, response and involvement in society overall.

If Public Theology is concerned with how the Christian faith addresses matters in society as a whole, then matters that originate within the Christian community and have a great effect on the society at large are of deep concern to the field.

It is no outlandish fact that many of the key figures and institutions on both sides of famous struggles throughout history have identified themselves, as well as the motivation behind their actions, with Christianity and Christian morals. Somehow, however, many of these figures and institutions have been responsible for horrible crimes against humanity, for example Hitler, The Apartheid Government and The Ku Klux Klan.

The recent assassination of Osama Bin Laden, the violent overthrow of Libya, even the 'Make Kony Famous' campaign, driven by the organisation 'Invisible Children', have forced us as a society today to be faced with situations where truthful moral discernment has been challenging to execute.

If an individual or regime is spreading harm and destruction, it is surely valiant to oppose this individual or regime, but the question that arises is whether it is then valiant to release the same harm and destruction upon that individual or regime in judgement of their actions, or even simply to halt them in their steps? Many of us will be lucky enough to only have to ponder about our true response to this question; however, others have been forced to choose a path of action.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man intrigued by Ghandi's pacifistic teachings, knowingly partook in the attempted murder of Adolf Hitler, a man known for spreading terror, death and destruction. This thesis aims at moving towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's choice of action, and the events, people and circumstances that influenced it.

I believe that one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's greatest contributions to theology has been his actions in resistance to Hitler during World War II.

Stanley Hauerwas presents an interesting angle on this greatly contested issue in his book entitled: '*Performing The Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*' (2004). Hauerwas' study will be drawn upon on occasion throughout this thesis.

Hauerwas considers Bonhoeffer's plot against Hitler as an unnecessary extreme for the Church in the world. However, he still considers Bonhoeffer, not only a great theologian, but also one who paved a way towards discovering a rightful place for the Church in the world, as well as within its relationship with the state during a very difficult time in the Church's history. This study will, however, move towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's actions as opposed to merely a critique thereof.

Bonhoeffer's involvement in the plotting of Hitler's assassination and his heroic help offered to the oppressed, presents to us a window into the mind of Christian community members who play an active part in the struggle of discernment in action in an atmosphere of terror and unjust action against their fellow members of society. The legacy of Apartheid has brought forth local examples of Christian community members who willingly played an active part in the discernment of action (regarding their own actions, and more broadly that of the Church in South Africa as well). Amongst these, Beyers Naudé and Archbishop Desmond Tutu are sterling examples.

This process of discernment is critical to explore within the field of Public Theology, but also in conjunction with Sociology, that offers a perspective on the individual, not only within the Christian community, but also in conjunction with the wider society

that he or she forms part of, especially in our day and age, where apathy has become a comfortable, yet possibly dangerous seat for many.

Eric Mataxas, the author of acclaimed '*Amazing Grace*', the biography of William Wilberforce, recently published a biography on Bonhoeffer entitled '*Bonhoeffer: Pastor Prophet, Martyr, Spy*' (2010). He notes the importance of Bonhoeffer's rejection of the formalism and '*cheap grace*' offered by the church and hails Bonhoeffer as a theological revolutionary, and a man still worth listening to today.

To consider Bonhoeffer's relevance today, it is imperative to consider his resistance on varying levels. To draw simple lines to current events and world forces would be an elementary mistake; the context of Bonhoeffer's life, theology and actions of resistance needs to be understood first, before one can draw any parallels to the context of the world we face today.

An interesting perspective on Bonhoeffer's resistance in conjunction with his theology is presented by John A. Moses in his book '*The Reluctant Revolutionary*': Here, Moses reflects on Bonhoeffer's significance as follows:

*"Bonhoeffer's perspective vision and readiness, without fear or favour, to oppose the anti-Christian Nazi regime, first in the word and then in deed, and to subject history of Christianity with regard to the treatment of Jews to relentless criticism, led to his martyrdom. In retrospect, it must be acknowledged that he initiated a veritable revolution in the way the church in general relates to the state and in particular now assesses the role of the synagogue throughout history"* (Moses 2009:205).

In this extract, Moses not only points to the relevance of Bonhoeffer's actions during his life in the midst of war, but he also places emphasis on the tremendous influence that these actions, in parallel with his theology, has had, and still has today in relation to the Church's interaction with the State on varying levels, especially in how we assess this interaction when reflecting on the past.

## **Research Questions**

Although Bonhoeffer is hailed by many as a type of Protestant saint, there is certainly also a plea for the realisation of paradox in his story; Bonhoeffer consciously associated himself with a plot against the life of another man. What led this young theologian, known for pacifistic ideals and full of promise, to participate in such a violent plot? How did Bonhoeffer and scholars who studied his life and work, justify his decision? How should we, as theologians and Christians in the twenty-first century, attempt to understand Bonhoeffer's resistance and its relevance for us today?

This thesis will thus aim at moving towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance of the Third Reich, his involvement in helping the oppressed and how his theology and the events of his life lead up to these actions. Therefore, the importance of questions like 'Why the righteous resist? Why do men and women striving towards righteousness often find themselves choosing to actively resist injustice with outright dedicated actions? How can Bonhoeffer aid us in moving towards an understanding of these convictions?'

## Methodology

To aid the move towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance, both sociological and theological lenses will be used. The biographies by authors: Eberhard Bethge ('*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*' 2000), Eric Matixas ('*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*' 2010) as well as Ferdinand Schlingensiepen ('*Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*' 2010) together with the DBWE collection will be used as main sources for this study, accompanied by a collection of other writings concerning Bonhoeffer's resistance of the Third Reich. The value of a sociological inquiry will be explored, with the work of Everett Rogers as aid in understanding righteous resistance, the main source being his '*Diffusion of Innovation: Volume 5*'.

As sociological perspective, the *Diffusion of Innovation Theory* of Rogers will be considered as a possible paradigm to aid the move towards understanding of Bonhoeffer's chosen path of conscious resistance. Bonhoeffer's life story will be told in short, with the focus on the pieces of his tale that are of essence in the formation of his path to resistance. By considering some of the most revered writings relating to his resistance that have emerged in abundance since his death, this thesis will aim at moving towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's actions and pertinent resistance of the Third Reich.

## Hypothesis

I theorise that Bonhoeffer's resistance will be found to have been as much theological, as it was sociologically motivated. The development of his theology and passionate theological convictions are difficult to separate from his formation as an

individual that was shaped by his family, friends and the sociological circumstances of Germany in the early twentieth century. Yet his theology will most likely through this discussion rise as a strong, stern force that guided him in the direction of resistance that he ultimately chose.

## Structure of Thesis

The first chapter will present an adaptation of Everett Rogers's *Diffusion of Innovation* theory as aid to understanding the climate of righteous resistance. Rogers presents a paradigm that considers how innovation, ideas and ideologies are diffused into new circles. The concept behind the theory is that there are specific steps in the acceptance or rejection of an innovation (or ideology) that displays the sociological background of the 'acceptor/rejecter' (this can be an individual or a group). This theory was born in the field of Sociology and offers an interesting structural model for considering the sociological background of its subject.

At first, the theory will be laid out in summarised form to set the background for the practical application later on in this thesis.

Chapter 2 will consist only of a brief outline of the events that shaped the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from his birth in 1906 to his death at the hand of the Nazi's in Germany in 1945. This section will not be aimed at providing a complete biographical account of Bonhoeffer's life, but merely a short timeline, placing events in perspective. Any student of Bonhoeffer's life will have to consult the definitive biography by his friend Eberhard Bethge, titled: '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary*'. For this study, the translated 2000 edition will be used as main source. Bethge himself was a German theologian and was close with



Bonhoeffer, his family, friends and colleagues, allowing him to tell Bonhoeffer's life story almost as if it was his own.

It would, however, be foolish to rely only on one biographical source that was arguably biased to the opinions and theologies of the subject and thus, Ferdinand Schlingensiepen work '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance*' (2010 English translation), as well as Eric Mataxas's recent and controversial biography '*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*' (2010) will also be drawn on for this study. Although Mataxas is a gripping writer, and presents Bonhoeffer in a way that would easily trigger the interest of many outside the field of theology, the book has received its share of critique. Most relevant would be Clifford Green's review on the book, originally published in '*The Christian Century*', 5 October 2010 edition, entitled 'Hijacking Bonhoeffer'. Here, Green states that Mataxas' book should be read with 'bifocals'. By this he is trying to state that, in his opinion, underneath Mataxas' respectable writing and charming style lies a deeper agenda. He notes that there is a masked drive in the book to convince the reader that there are similarities in the dominance of the Third Reich over the people of Germany and the current American Government over their people. Green summarises this agenda as Mataxas' wanting to reclaim Bonhoeffer from the 'Liberals' who, according to Mataxas, have 'hijacked' the theologian. However, few will argue about Bonhoeffer's relevance today, although some might disagree with the way in which Mataxas proposes it.

The subsequent chapter (Chapter 3) will attempt to move towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance and related actions, with hopes of clarifying his motivations, as well as his influences.

This chapter will consider who and what Bonhoeffer resisted, by looking at the leadership of Germany at the time, as well as Bonhoeffer's connection to the Jewish community in Germany.

The focus will then shift to Bonhoeffer's motivations for resistance, by ultimately considering Bonhoeffer's formation, the people in his life who played significant parts in shaping his theology and world view, as well as Bonhoeffer's theology and, most notably, his Christology.

The next focus area will reflect Bonhoeffer's methods of resistance and lastly, some responses to his chosen path, drawing on opinions both in support and in opposition to Bonhoeffer's chosen path of resistance, as well as the reception his resistance received in South Africa, during Apartheid, and thereafter. For these concluding remarks, John De Gruchy's book entitled '*Bonhoeffer in South Africa*' (1984) will be drawn upon, as well as articles by Robert Vosloo and Nico Koopman.

Chapter four will use the information presented in the preceding chapters to formulate an understanding of Bonhoeffer's acceptance of the ideology he ultimately lived out by applying the information to the skeleton of Rogers's model explained in Chapter 1.

Bonhoeffer undoubtedly offers his modern day readers, followers and enthusiasts a glimpse into a world where theological theories are tested to the utmost. Many individuals will have the luxury of spending their lives pondering and formulating ideologies, theories and paths of action, but will never be faced with putting those scribbled words into motion. Bonhoeffer was denied this luxury, but took up the challenge with great bravery.

# CHAPTER ONE:

## A Model for considering Bonhoeffer's resistance:

### Diffusion of Innovation Theory

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#### **Sociology and Theology**

In his article '*Sociological and Theological Perspectives*' (1987), published in Gill, R. (1987): '*Theology and Sociology: A Reader*', Peter Berger addresses the connection between the field of Theology and Sociology. Berger notes that his scholarly observations have lead him to believe that sociological studies cannot be complete without a consideration for the theological perspectives present, and thus, he presumes it to be the same from a theological standpoint. He states that a society's religion is intrinsically part of that society's interaction. In his opinion, one cannot consider the actions of an individual or society from only a theological perspective, as it would be a false interpretation if the sociological conditions surrounding these actions were disregarded. He notes that:

*"An 'empirical theology' is, of course, methodologically impossible. But a theology that proceeds in a step-by-step correlation with what can be said about man empirically is well worth a serious try"* (1987:100).

Robert L. Montgomery is of a similar conviction. A missiologist by profession, he has dedicated a large amount of time to the integrative study of missiology and sociology. The most prominent of his works concerned is entitled: '*Introduction to the Sociology of Mission*' (1999). Within the pages of this book, Montgomery presents the findings of his own inquiry into the importance of theological study within the field

of Missiology and thus broader, Theology. Montgomery presents a paradoxical argument: He advocates the importance of a clear differentiation between the social sciences and theological studies, but at the same time, promotes the need for improvement of communication between the two disciplines.

Montgomery considers the value of diffusion research to the field of missiology, stating that there has been a lack of application of theories in the theological realm. He states that before the work of Rogers, diffusion research had failed to give the needed attention to religion, as well as ideologies, and in turn, also failed to study individuals as unit of analysis (Montgomery 1999:43).

Although Montgomery applies the Diffusion of Innovation Theory from a sociology of missiology perspective, he hints at the possibility of applying this model as an aid to uncovering the process of diffusion or acceptance of innovations, and even ideologies or ideas and the formation of specific convictions within a theological framework.

Montgomery uses a familiar sociological paradigm to consider the diffusion of new convictions or persuasions (in his case, the Christian message) into communities in the missionary field. This paradigm is known as 'The Diffusion of Innovation Theory' and is accredited to Everett Rogers, a sociologist specialising in the field of innovation and its effect on society. Rogers has done more work on the topic of diffusion than any other sociologist in the field.

Montgomery motivates his use of this paradigm by pointing out that there exists a great variety of qualities in different people (and thus between societies), that can cause them to accept or to reject an innovation or ideal, as well as many qualities in innovations or ideals that can cause people to readily accept them or to resist them.

## Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory or Paradigm

Arvind Singhal, a colleague of Rogers tells of the development of Rogers' theory in an article published in '*Journal of Health Communication*' after Rogers' death entitled: '*The life and work of Everett Rogers: some personal reflections*' (2005). Rogers grew up as a farmer's son in Iowa. He witnessed through the years, the rise in agricultural technology and was confronted daily with his father's struggle of acceptance thereof. Singhal tells of Rogers' father's willingness to accept more industrial advances but readily rejected biochemical advances. According to Singhal this is what planted the seed of inquiry that would later develop into Rogers' life work in the field of diffusion of innovations (2005:286).

Another colleague and friend of Rogers, Thomas E. Backer states that although Rogers at first considered technological innovations and advances and the diffusion of these into differing social systems, he soon started applying his theories to the political realm, considering the acceptance and rejection of certain policies and ideals writhing different social groups. Rogers' work was hailed by many as the foundation for all studies in this field and serves as a 'text book' for sociologists today (2005:285).

It is the argument of this thesis that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's resistance, although undeniably rooted in his theological convictions, cannot be viewed without a sociological perspective of his acceptance of the convictions that drove him to willingly partake in the attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler. The plausibility of the paradigm laid out by Rogers as a respectable backbone to the investigation into Bonhoeffer's resistance will be explored here.

‘*Social diffusion*’ is defined by Rogers as:

*“The process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication in that the messages are concerned with new ideas”*  
(Rogers 2003:5).

The communication involved in the process of diffusion carries then a new message (or idea). This message can either be novel, as it is a direct message portrayed to an individual who has not encountered this message before, or the communication process can spur the creation of an inventive message by the individual. This then spurs the creation of a ‘*diffusion of innovation*’ theory or paradigm. The rest of this chapter will be consulting the fifth addition of Rogers’ acclaimed book ‘*Diffusion of Innovations*’ (2003).

Rogers uses the term ‘diffusion’ to address ideas communicated through both planned and unplanned channels. He defines ‘diffusion’ as:

*“a special type of communication, in which the messages content gives diffusion its special character. The newness means that some degree of uncertainty is involved in diffusion”* (2003:28)

The following section will offer a description of the Diffusion of Innovations model presented by Rogers.

## Elements of Diffusion

After analysing copious amounts of field studies of the process of the diffusion of innovations, Rogers identifies certain reoccurrences and thus, is able to define the process of diffusion by means of four elements (Rogers 2003:11-35):

The first element he identifies is 'innovation'. He describes this innovation to be the ideology or idea adopted by the individual, as well as its origins, nature and popularity amongst fellow community members. He notes that:

*"The characteristics of an innovation, as perceived by the members of a social system, determine its rate of adoption"* (2003:36)

Here Rogers notes that there are a number of things to consider regarding this concept of innovation. One must look at relative advantage, in other words, the extent to which the innovation is observed as better than the idea it replaces. One then needs to consider its compatibility, its ability to be observed as being consistent with the prevailing values, past experiences and need of possible adopters. The complexity is also highlighted as important, given that the innovation might be observed as problematic to comprehend. Rogers further notes that an element of trialability should be investigated. Lastly, the observability of the innovation must be considered. This would refer to the extent to which the outcomes are perceptible to others. Rogers notes that:

*"The easier it is for individuals to see results of an innovation, the more likely they are to adopt it"* (2003:35)

The second element identified is the 'communication system'. This refers to the method by which the individual was exposed to this idea or innovation and their communication of it to other community members. Rogers notes here that many individuals rely not on the method of communication as the ultimate motivation for adoption of an innovation or idea, but that an immense role is played by the acceptance or rejection of this said innovation or idea by the peers of the individual (Rogers 2003:18).

An important point that Rogers makes here is that the context of each individual needs to be considered together with their reaction (whether it be in acceptance or rejection of the idea or innovation). He states:

*"A distinctive aspect of diffusion is that at least some degree of 'heterophily' is usually present in communication about innovations. 'Heterophily' is the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are different in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status, and the like. The opposite of 'heterophily' is 'homophily', the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain aspects."* (2003:36)

The third element is 'time'. It is important, according to Rogers, to consider the time taken for the innovation to be adopted. The presence of the stages of adoption experienced by the individual plays a role here. Rogers identifies five steps in this process: Knowledge, persuasion, making the decision, implementation and confirmation (Rogers 2003:20). Rogers emphasises the importance of time in the study of diffusion of innovations of ideas but notes that it does foster a weakness. He notes the following:



*“Much other behavioural science research is timeless in the sense that the time dimension is simply ignored. The inclusion of time as a variable in diffusion research is one of its strenghts, but the measurement of the time dimenstion (often by means of respondents’ recall) can be criticized”*  
(2003:37)

There are also different speeds at which an individual can adopt an innovation or idea, classifying the individual as one of the following: early adopter, early majority, late majority or a laggard (Rogers 2003:22). The early adopter would be an individual who adopts the innovation or idea at the initial stage of its diffusion – where no other community members have adopted it yet, thus starting off the diffusion process. The early majority would be the first group of individuals that start adopting the innovation or idea, with the late majority following. The laggard would be an individual that only accepts the innovation or idea after the majority had already done so and grown accustomed to it.

The last element identified is the ‘social system’: This discusses which social system the individual forms part of in terms of interrelated units present within the plot of his/her life, the engagement of these units in communal problems solving, and the unified goal the entire social system (interrelated units as well as individual of concern) was striving for, if at all present.

Rogers continues the discussion by looking at the following terms (Rogers 2003:26):

*Opinion leadership:* an individual’s ability to informally influence another’s attitudes or behaviour, frequently, in a desired way

*Change Agent*: an individual who intends to change another individual's decisions in a direction desired by the agent

*Aide*: an individual who unsuccessfully, yet pertinently, tries to change another individual's decisions in a direction desired by the agent.

## **The Innovation-Decision Process**

*"The innovation-decision process is the process through which an individual (or other decision-making unit) passes from first knowledge of an innovation to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation and use of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision"* (2003:36)

The model of the 'innovation-decision process' consists of five sequential stages (2003:168). Knowledge arises when an individual encounters an innovation's existence and advances an understanding of how it functions. Rogers states that:

*"At this stage the individual wants to know what the innovation is and how and why it works, or will be advantageous"* (2003:36)

The individual then forms either a positive or hostile attitude towards the innovation and this is referred to as the stage of persuasion. A decision is then made when the individual engages in actions that lead to a choice to either accept or reject the innovation. Here Rogers notes that:

*"Increasingly at the persuasion stage, and especially at the decision stage, an individual seeks innovation-evaluation information in order to reduce uncertainty about an innovation's expected consequences. Here an individual*

*wants to know the innovation's advantages and disadvantages in his or her own situation" (2003:38)*

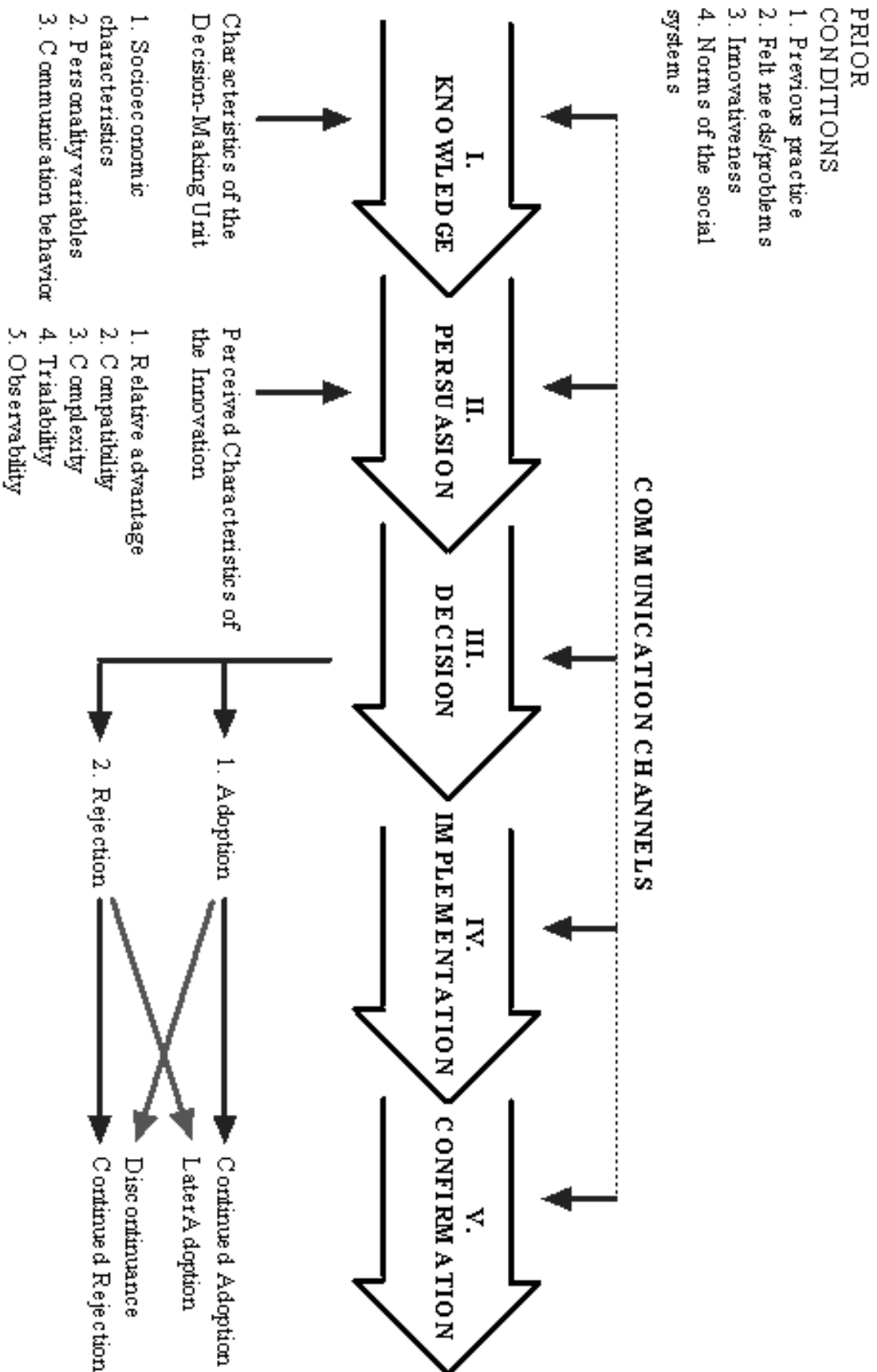
Rogers also notes that it is important to consider the 'norms' of the social system present. He defines the term 'norms' as follows:

*"Norms are the established behavioural patterns for the members of a social system. They define a range of tolerable behaviour and serve as a guide or a standard for the members' behaviour is expected" (2003:38)*

The next step that follows is innovation, which arises when an individual implements a new idea. Lastly, an individual seeks reinforcement of an innovation-decision if exposed to conflicting messages about innovation and the stage of conformation is reached.

Rogers lays out these five stages and their relativity to the mentioned characteristics in the preceding visual arrangement, in the form of a chart mapping the channels of communication.

In this chart, Rogers also refers to the characteristics of adopter categories, relevant to the knowledge stage of the communication process: Socioeconomic characteristics, personality variables and communication of behaviour (Rogers 2003:287-292).



The paradigm discussed above will only be employed briefly in this thesis to consider the possible value it might bring to the understanding what lead to the decision Dietrich Bonhoeffer took to embark on his path of resistance of the Nazi Regime. Thus, after a consideration of Bonhoeffer's life (Chapter 3) and an investigation into his resistance (Chapter 4), the paradigm will be drawn on to bring the information presented together, hoping to create a skeleton structure for considering Bonhoeffer's resistance (Chapter 5) from not only a theological perspective, but a sociological one as well.

## CHAPTER TWO:

# The Life of Bonhoeffer: a brief overview

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Many tell Bonhoeffer's story with its dramatic end as departure point, drawing on some of his last words to a fellow prisoner:

*"This is the end, for me the beginning of life"* (Bethge, 2000:927).

Before one can truly understand the significance of his life and work, the background against which it played off needs to be explained, and compellingly grasped.

Upon the birth of the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the town of Breslau, on 4 February 1906, together with his twin sister Sabine Bonhoeffer, no one could have known what an infamous German generation this little boy would one day form part of. Even less could it have been known to what a dramatic end his life would come 39 years later. Young Bonhoeffer entered the world before the concept of a '*World War*' even truly existed; when he departed the world, he was not yet seen as a hero. Bonhoeffer would in later years, however, be viewed as a type of Protestant saint, as mentioned before. Frits de Lange wrote an interesting article on the topic entitled: '*Saint Bonhoeffer? Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Paradox of Sainthood*'. Here, he argues that Sainthood is not necessarily a desirable title, and considers Bonhoeffer's title as 'Protestant Saint' from this perspective:

*"After all non-moral virtues are also part of the good life that is pursued in ethics. If one only wants to be good in the moral sense of the word, one will never be able to become an Olympic swimmer, a concert pianist, or a*

*successful scientist. If one only wants to be good, one will never be able to perfect one's backhand or curl up with a good book solely because it gives pleasure to oneself – and to nobody else“ (De Lange 2004:1)*

Stephen R. Haynes also addresses this title that some bestowed on Bonhoeffer, although from another angle, in his book *'The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: portraits of a Protestant Saint'*. Haynes' argument will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The following brief biographical overview of Bonhoeffer's life will draw mainly on the biography by Eberhard Bethge, *'Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary'* (2000), as well as Eric Mataxas' recent publication: *'Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy. A righteous gentile vs the Third Reich'* (2011) and Ferdinand Schlingensiepen's *'Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance'* (2010). Some of Bonhoeffer's written letters and notes will also be presented where needed; these extracts will come from Bonhoeffer's work as presented in varying volumes of the *'Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English translation'* collection (Bonhoeffer, DBWE) (1996-2012).

The Bonhoeffers were a respected middle class family with a combined family lineage drawn down from Karl Bonhoeffer and Paula von Hase, that included amongst others, academics, pastors, government officials, musicians and artists (Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 2000). Karl von Hase, Bonhoeffer's grandfather, was an esteemed theologian himself. His works include: *'Evangelisch-protestantische Dogmatik'* (1826), *'Gnosis oder prot. –evang. Glaubenslehre; Vol 1'* (1821) Vol 2 (1828) and *'Kirchengeschichte, Lehrbuch zunächst für akademische Vorlesungen'* (1983).

One thing, however, is sure; the eight children, born in a space of only ten years, had a great responsibility to carry forth the heritage of their predecessors. Bethge refers to them as being aware of their role as;

*“guardians of a great historical heritage and intellectual tradition”* (2000:4).

From Bethge’s account of Bonhoeffer’s childhood, it becomes clear that, although both the Bonhoeffers and the Von Hases (Paula Bonhoeffer’s family) had great respect for their existing social order, they had rooted in them even greater humanistic concern (2000:4). This concern would soon start to bubble up in Bonhoeffer and develop into something rather significant.

Mataxas highlights Karl Bonhoeffer’s description of his predecessors:

*“My grandfather and his three brothers were plainly no average men. Each had his special trait, but common to them all was an idealistic streak, with a fearless readiness to act on their convictions”* (2010:8).

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was six years old, the Bonhoeffers moved to Berlin where, true to family tradition, his father excelled in the academic world - teaching neurology and psychiatry. From what is told about Bonhoeffer and his family, it seems that all the children enjoyed a privileged and comfortable childhood. The family, although they were Christian, never attended church regularly (Bethge 2000:3-28).

In 1914, the First World War had started and the Church had expressed its support and thus, lost its credibility in the minds of some. In 1917, Klaus-Friederich and Walter Bonhoeffer, Bonhoeffer’s older brothers, were called to military service, and both insisted on joining the infantry. On 28 April 1918, only two weeks after having



left, Walter was killed. This was an event that undoubtedly shook the Bonhoeffer household to the core (Bethge 2000:15).

Schlingensiepen highlights the immensity of Bonhoeffer's mother's mourning for her lost son:

*"The death of this son was more than Paula Bonhoeffer could bear. For weeks she lay in bed, as if paralysed, in the home of the Schönes next door and was screened off from everyone. The father kept silent and quietly left the room whenever Walter's name was mentioned"* (2010:13).

Bethge recounts that the impact that this event had on Bonhoeffer was visible even years later as he taught his students at Finkenwalde regarding "*reverent conduct of services of national sorrow*" (Bethge 2000:16).

According to Mataxas, only at the age of 14 was Bonhoeffer brave enough to tell his family of his conviction to study theology (2010:37). In 1923, the year that Bonhoeffer turned 17, he started his theological studies at Tübingen University. Bethge narrates that according to Bonhoeffer's siblings, he was

*"taking the path of least resistance, and that the church to which he proposed to devote himself was a poor, feeble, boring, petty and bourgeois institution"*(Bethge 2000:22).

Luckily, young Bonhoeffer did not let their comments deter him, and responded simply by uttering;

*"In that case I shall reform it!"*(Bethge 2000:22).

Bethge further points out that Bonhoeffer's motives and origin of his calling could never be fully known, as he chose to keep that to himself. Bethge views the absence of any biographical clues in this regard as significant:

*"a pointer to [Bonhoeffer's] belief that the roots of one's innermost vocation should remain a secret; [Bonhoeffer] felt that curiosity in the matter released self-destructive forces"*(2000:20).

Schlingensiepen notes that during Bonhoeffer's years at school and university:

*"Germany was a republic which was increasingly bitterly resented by a majority of the population, though not in the Bonhoeffer's parents' home or by the people who visited there. Thus to have a different political opinion from that of the majority was nothing unusual to him"* (2010:4)

Between studies, Bonhoeffer found the time to join the Hedgehog fraternity of which both his father and uncle had been members, and he also spent a total of 14 days in military training.

As 1923 drew to a close, the economy had forced many people to tighten their belt buckles. In hope of lessening the burden on his parents, Bonhoeffer soon enrolled at Berlin's then Friedrich Wilhelm University (later known as Humboldt University), but not before a period he called '*a quarter of special studies*' that were spent, together with his brother Claus, travelling across Europe and North Africa. According to Bethge, Bonhoeffer had an audience with the Pope in this time, but described the experience as less than expected:

*"Great expectations dashed. It was fairly impersonal and coolly celebrative. The pope (Pius XI) made a fairly indifferent impression on me. He lacked*

*everything that is indicative of a pope. Grandeur and anything extraordinary was missing. Sad that it had that effect!”* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 9: The Young Bonhoeffer 2004:107)

The two brothers visited a great amount of destinations, including Bologna, Florence, Milan, Pompeii, Scilly, Siena, as well as Libya (Bethge 2000:43-44). Of all the places visited, Bethge seems to highlight his encounters in Rome as being the most influential (2000:43). Bonhoeffer kept a journal of his time in Italy. He mentions all the historic and religious sight he visited, all the artworks he was able to see and describes all the services he attended while at the Vatican (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 9, 2004:81-109).

On returning to Berlin, Bonhoeffer took a mere 18 months to complete and defend his doctoral-thesis successfully, a pursuit he embarked on at the age of 19. His thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, was considered as a rather ground-breaking look at the nature of the Christian church. Karl Barth responded to Bonhoeffer’s dissertation as follows:

*“I openly confess that I have misgivings whether I can even maintain the high level reached by Bonhoeffer, saying no less in my own words and context, and saying it no less forcefully, than did this young man so many years ago”*  
(Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 1, 1998: 2)

Bonhoeffer’s theological brilliance was not at all surprising, considering that he had already started with Hebrew and reading the likes of Schleiermacher at school (Bethge 2000).

Reinhold Seeberg directed Bonhoeffer's dissertation. Although they were not considered to be kindred theological spirits, Bonhoeffer enthusiastically did much work on the five volumes of Seeberg's *'History of Dogmatic theology'*. These were of the first collections to find a place in Dietrich's personal library, and all his favourite Martin Luther quotations were underlined in them. This collection would also be the grounding source of Bonhoeffer's knowledge of Luther, who, together with Karl Barth, are considered by Bethge to be Bonhoeffer's greatest influences (Bethge 2000:47). It is at this stage in his life that Bonhoeffer already realised that the theological (as well as cultural) crisis facing the European society of the time was poorly addressed by the anthropological optimism of the reigning theological tradition (Bethge 2000:48).

While still working under Seeberg, Bonhoeffer came into contact with the likes of Adolf von Harnack and Karl Holl (a Luther scholar), who introduced him to the great thinkers of history from Augustine, Aquinas and Schleiermacher (as already mentioned, Bonhoeffer had already started reading Schleiermacher's work while still at school) to the great philosophers, including Nietzsche, Kant and Hegel (Bethge 2000:46-55).

On 15 February 1928, Bonhoeffer embarked on an assistant pastorate in Barcelona. Clifford Green notes that parish ministry granted Bonhoeffer time to partake in a number of interesting ventures, which included improving the children's ministry as well as initiating a discussion group for older adolescents and even putting on a Christmas pageant, all the while taking additional classes to improve his Spanish (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 10, 2007:5). The small Protestant community that he served was far more conservative than the community he was part of in Berlin, yet Bonhoeffer felt strangely at home in the church (Bethge 2000:74-77). Matixas

presents a letter that Bonhoeffer wrote to his parents on 11 April 1928 about the bull fighting he had encountered in Barcelona and his strange fascination with the passion expressed by all present (2010:75).

*"I had already seen one and cannot really say that it shocked me all that much, that is, the way many people think they owe it to their central European civilization to be shocked. It is, after all, a great spectacle to see wild, unrestrained power and blind rage fight against and ultimately succumb to disciplined courage, presence of mind, and skill. The gruesome element plays only a small role, especially since in this bullfight the horses had stomach protectors for the first time so that the horrible images from my first corrida were absent. What is interesting is that it took a long struggle before they were permitted to start using these stomach protectors for the horses. Probably the majority of spectators do indeed just want to see blood and cruelty. Overall, the people vent all these powerful emotions, and you get drawn into it yourself"* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 10, 2008:83)

The bullfighting was, however, not the only piece of Barcelona's cultural extravagance that fascinated Bonhoeffer. Schlingensiepen picks up on the remarkable interest Bonhoeffer showed in Cervantes' *'Don Quixote'*. He tells of an acquaintance that took Bonhoeffer to a film screening of the novel. Bonhoeffer was captivated, even though he did not fully comprehend the entire tale. This prompted him to buy a copy of the novel that Schlingensiepen dubs "*the greatest work of Spanish literature*" (2010:52).

In Bonhoeffer's 'Ethics', he refers to this remarkable work and considers its implications for what was then the present time:

*“The perennial figure of Don Quixote has become contemporary, the ‘knight of the doleful countenance’ who, with a shaving basin for a helmet and a miserable nag for a charger, rides into endless battle for the chosen lady of his heart, who doesn’t even exist. This is the picture of the adventurous enterprise of an old world against a new one, of a past reality against a contemporary one, of a noble dreamer against the overpowering force of the commonplace ...”* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004:80)

In conclusion, Bonhoeffer writes:

*“Only the mean-spirited can read the fate of don Quixote without sharing in and being moved by it”* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004:81).

The next year, Bonhoeffer was granted an assistant lecturer post under W. Lütgert in Berlin. In July 1930, he was handed his qualification for teaching at University level after completing *‘Act and Being’*. Bonhoeffer delivered his inaugural lecture, which Green states to have been, not surprisingly, based on his postdoctoral dissertation and titled: *‘The Anthropological Question in Contemporary Philosophy and Theology’* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 10, 2007:15).

Only a few months later, Bonhoeffer boarded a ship to Union Seminary in New York. America’s contrasting theological and social atmosphere was soon to send Bonhoeffer into a journey of discovery. At Union Seminary, Bonhoeffer worked and studied under Reinhold Niebuhr, well-known for his work in the area of social ethics. According to Bethge, it was during this time that Bonhoeffer came to the realisation that the purpose of theology and ethics was to change this world for the better (2000:115-122).

It was also in New York that Bonhoeffer was befriended by a man named Franklin Fisher. Fisher took Bonhoeffer with him to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 10, 2007:29). Here, Bonhoeffer witnessed what he found lacking in Germany – the social engagement of the church. Bonhoeffer was so drawn to this church that he decided to teach Sunday school in Harlem. Paul Lehmann, who became a good friend of Bonhoeffer, and at who's house he would celebrate his twenty-fifth birthday, described Bonhoeffer's encounter with the community of Harlem in the following words (Bethge 2000:114):

*“What was so impressive was the way in which he pursued the understanding of the problem to its minutest detail through books and countless visits to Harlem, through participation in Negro youth work, but even more through a remarkable kind of identity with the Negro community, so that he was received there as though he had never been an outsider at all.”*

Although Bethge explains that Lehmann tried everything in his power to convince Bonhoeffer to obtain a professorship in America, Bonhoeffer would soon return to his home country (Bethge 2000:115).

After a little less than a year in America, Bonhoeffer had his first meeting with Karl Barth in Bonn in July 1931. Bethge's account of Bonhoeffer's interest in and relationship with Barth is certainly notable. He writes that there are four phases that occurred in the relations between the two men and state them to be the following:

Firstly, he states that Bonhoeffer came into contact with Barth through his writings. This leads Bonhoeffer to raise an array of epistemological questions directed at Barth in both '*Sanctorum Communio*' and '*Act and Being*' (Barth would only become fully aware of this after Dietrich's death in 1945).

Secondly, Bonhoeffer meets with Barth on a few occasions from 1931 to 1933. Bonhoeffer went into these meetings, hoping to gain Barth's support regarding his concern for the concrete ethical commandments of the Church, but was not rewarded with this, at least, not in the way he had wished.

Thirdly, theological differences started to surface strongly. Although Bonhoeffer continued to hope for Barth's support, he would only gain his praise upon the release of *'The Cost of Discipleship'* (after Dietrich's death in 1945).

Lastly, Bonhoeffer raises indirect questions in his *'Letters and Papers from Prison'* (LPP) (30 April, 1944). Barth could never accept the term *'revelationary positivism'*, which occurred in passing in these letters.

Bethge continues to summarise Bonhoeffer's interaction with Barth:

*"Whatever the implications of Bonhoeffer's earlier or later criticisms of Barth may be, in all four phases he wanted them to be regarded as coming from inside and not outside the Barthian movement"* (Bethge 2000:134).

Bonhoeffer returned to Berlin University to lecture in the theology faculty. On 5 November 1931, he was finally ordained (Bethge 2000:165) after he had been refused ordination in 1930 as he had not yet turned twenty-five. During the next year, Bonhoeffer started stepping up as academic and lectured a number of courses on the following topics: *'The History of Systematic Theology in the Twentieth Century'*, *'The Concept of Philosophy and Protestant Theology'*, *'The Nature of the Church'*, *'Is there Christian Ethic?'*, *'Creation and Sin'* published in 1933 as *Creation and Fall*, *'Recent Theology'* and a seminar on *'Problems of a Theological Anthropology'* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009).



On 30 January 1933, Hitler had come to power. One day later, Bonhoeffer gave a radio talk titled *'The Younger generation's Changed Concept of the Führer'*. By analysing the development and the changes to the concept of the Führer that had been undergone, he, according to Bethge:

*"made no secret of his contempt for the 'unnatural narcissism of...youth made vain by old fools" (2000:193).*

It was in this delivery that Bonhoeffer stated the following;

*"If a leader surrenders to the wishes of his followers then the image of the leader (Führer) will gradually become the image of the misleader (Verführer)" (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009:267).*

The article of Robert Vosloo, *'Bonhoeffer, leadership and a call for new authority: A South African Perspective'*, brings an interesting perspective to light here, but will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Before Bonhoeffer was able to complete his planned speech, he was cut off. There has been much speculation about whether he was truly cut off as a result of the pre-set time limit. Bethge, although suspicious of the coincidence of the timing of the cut off, which occurred before he was able to make his concluding remarks, questions the plausibility of Dr Joseph Goebbels (the Reich Minister of Propaganda and Hitler's 'right hand man') gaining enough power and intelligence in two days to have executed this cut off (2000:194).

Bonhoeffer was disappointed about what had happened during the broadcast and took it upon him to spread copies of his speech among friends and relatives (Bethge 2000:194).

From here on forward, Bonhoeffer's theological work would start to tie very strongly with the problems and changes facing Germany. In the same year, Bonhoeffer proclaimed the following two passages in a sermon entitled '*Sonntag nach Trinitatis*' on 19 June 1932:

*"The church has only one altar, the altar of the Almighty... before which all creatures must kneel ... Whoever seeks something other than this must keep away, he cannot join us in the house of god ... The church has only one pulpit, and from the pulpit, faith in God will be preached, and no other faith, and no other will than the will of God, however well intended"* (2010:144).

*"... Must it be that Christendom, which began so revolutionary, is now conservative for all time? [must it be] that every new movement must break ground without the Church, that the Church always comprehends twenty years later what has actually happened? If it must really be so, then should we be surprised if times come for our church when the blood of martyrs will be called for? But this blood, if we then really have the courage and fidelity to shed it, will not be so innocent and clear as that of the first witnesses. Our blood will be heavenly burdened with our own great guilt, the guilt of the useless servant"* (Rasmussen 1972:54).

Could it be that this was the start of Bonhoeffer's public path of resistance against the Nazi regime?

In 1933, Bonhoeffer published an article on '*The Church and the Jewish Question*'.

In this article, Bonhoeffer urged the church to stand up in defence of the Jewish people. He mentioned three ways in which the church could pursue this resistance:

1. The church can question the legitimacy of the actions of the state.
2. The church can aid the victims of state action ('unconditional obligation').
3. The church should not only bandage the wounds of the victims that have fallen under the wheel of injustice but it can '*jam a spoke into the wheel itself*' (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009:361-370).

In August, a pamphlet by Bonhoeffer, entitled '*The Aryan Clause in the Church*' was released (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009:425-432). In this pamphlet, Bonhoeffer considers the implications of the Reich's '*Aryan Clause*' on the church and Jewish-Christians. He suggests three possibilities, and then rejects each in turn. Bethge summarises these as follows:

1. The exclusion of non-Aryans from the Reich Church and their formation into special congregations: this would necessitate an immediate departure from such a church. To do this would be '*my act of solidarity with my Church which I can never serve except in entire truth, with all the consequences of that truth*'. This was not however, the conclusion of the 1933 synods.
2. The application of the State's Civil Service law to church officials: this would mean resigning from ministry. At this point we find the characteristically Bonhoefferian argument, of '*fatal privilege*'. Thus, clergy '*must see that the only service they can still in all truthfulness render their Church is to lay down their pastoral office which has become a privilege*'. This became a crucial issue in Berlin on 24 August, and at the General Synod of 5 and 6 September.
3. The Reich Church Constitution of 14 July 1933, by its silence on the legislation, already in force for the (state) universities (including the theological faculties), had excluded the possibility of a new generation of Jewish-Christian pastors; no one had said a word. Bonhoeffer and

Hildebrandt must have felt that they were crying in the wilderness. In his pamphlet, therefore, Bonhoeffer envisages the possibility that the Church might find means other than existing universities to prepare Jewish Christians for the ministry. He states: *'For should she fail to do this, she must accept responsibility for the whole of the Aryan clause'* (Bethge 2000:235-236; cf Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009: 431).

Concerning this article, Rasmussen states that:

*"Readers might overlook that while Bonhoeffer outline church actions, his argument about treatment of the Jews was based on grounds that theologians and the church ignored, namely, that the state's anti-Jewish legislation was based on race identification, not religion"* (Rasmussen, 1972:56; Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 12, 2009:35).

As the year came to a close, on 17 October Bonhoeffer took up a pastorate in London and left Germany once again. Bethge states that Bonhoeffer had made it clear in a conversation with Muller that;

*"... he had no intention of representing the German Christian cause abroad, and would speak, as before, for the ecumenical movement"* (Bethge, 2000:250).

Bonhoeffer gained approval for his departure from the National Bishop, who he spoke to in person regarding the matter (Bethge 2000:251).

The Catholic Church pledged not to organise against the new order, but the Nazi intrusion into the church upset many Protestants. This growing division of the church plagued Bonhoeffer.

In September, Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller wrote a document of protest together, which led to the creation of an organisation that supported Jewish-Christian Pastors known as the Pastor's Emergency League (Mataxas 2010:207). During his time spent in London, Bonhoeffer acted as *de facto* leader of the German pastors in England. Bonhoeffer soon persuaded the German pastors he was serving to join the cause. Bonhoeffer and his colleagues started using telegrams as a weapon of resistance against what was happening in the Reich Church Government. Bethge explains their method as follows;

*"Since they were able to apply pressure by threatening to break the connection between their own churches and the German Evangelical Church, they determined to impede every fresh move on the part of the church government and take some of the burden off the shoulders of their brethren in the emergency League"* (Bethge 2000:268).

This compelled Bishop Theodor Heckel, a German Evangelical Church official in charge of foreign affairs, to visit London to diffuse this disturbance (Bethge 2000:274). After lengthy discussion and an on-going opposition from both sides, Heckel called Bonhoeffer to Berlin (Bethge 2000:291), where he was instructed to steer away from all ecumenical activity and commitments. However, Bonhoeffer's visit to Berlin allowed him to partake in the first '*free synod*', which led to the planning of the '*Confessing synod*' at Barmen (Bethge 2000:292-295).

Back in London, Bonhoeffer befriended Bishop George K.A. Bell from Chichester. Their friendship was rooted in their common concern for the church in Germany. Both men believed in the ecumenical movement as a way to renew the church and build a lasting peace (Bethge 2000:283-289).

Bonhoeffer's resistance against the Reich invasion of the church had started to take flame. Although not present, Bonhoeffer earnestly took up the decisions of both the Barmen and Dahlem synods that

*"acknowledged and arrived at doctrinal decisions, defined the heretic and called upon the Church, in obedience to the Gospel, to separate from him"*  
(Bethge 2000:220-221).

It was at Barmen where the '*Confessing Church*' came into being (Bethge 2000:266).

In 1934, the pastors in Germany who had been opposing Hitler and resisting Nazi rule had been struggling. In August 1934, Bonhoeffer participated in a conference of the Universal Christian Council of Life and Work at Fanö (Bethge 2000:298). He was expected to organise a youth conference and deliver a plenary lecture which he titled: "*The Universal Church and the World of Nations*" (Bethge 2000:300-301).

As was expected of Bonhoeffer, his lecture was considerably controversial, given that it focused on the Christian obligation and responsibility to maintain peace and not on simple practical questions as many other theologians might have preferred:

*"There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared. It is the great venture. It can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to mistrust, and this mistrust in turn brings forth war"* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 13, 2007:309).

After many years of seeking an opportunity to visit India, Bonhoeffer was invited to study Non-Violent Resistance under Mahatma Gandhi. The invitation had originated from a letter written to Gandhi by Bishop Bell in October 1934, to which Gandhi responded positively (Bethge 2000:320). Although he was excited about the

opportunity, he would, unknowingly to him at the time, never be able to realise this dream (Bethge 2000:331-332). Bonhoeffer's interest in visiting India and meeting with Gandhi had been mounting for some years, and had been brushed off by many of his friends and confidants, including Karl Barth (Bethge 2000:329). The importance of Bonhoeffer's fascination with Mahatma Gandhi will be explored later on in the discussion.

In 1935, there was a need for the Confessing Church to find a channel for the training of new clergy and candidates for administration, as Reich Bishop Müller had closed the Old Prussian Union's preacher seminaries. This opened up an opportunity for Bonhoeffer to return once again to Berlin and fill a directorship position at the new seminary (Bethge 2000:333).

According to Mataxas, Bonhoeffer had, however, initially doubted whether to take up the position or not, as reflected in a letter to Erwin Sutz, a friend of Bonhoeffer's from New York:

*"I am hopelessly torn between staying here, going to India and returning to Germany to take charge of a preachers' seminary shortly to be opened there. I no longer believe in the university, and never really have believed in it – to your irritation. The entire education of the younger generation of theologians belongs today in church cloister like schools, in which pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount and worship are taken seriously – as they never are and in present circumstances couldn't be) at the university. It is also high time we broke with our theologically based restraint towards the state's actions – which, after all, is only fear. "Speak out for those who cannot speak" – who in*

*the church today realize that this is the very least that the Bible requires of us?"* (2010:247 cf. Bonhoeffer DBWE Vol 13, 2007:204).

Bonhoeffer, however, decided to take up the position, but ran the seminary in his own style. Bethge, who was a student of Bonhoeffer's at Finkenwalde, affectionately describes Bonhoeffer's time at the seminary as follows:

*"A preachers' seminary had once seemed to him a place to be avoided; now it was a place where, for a few years, his doubt and unrest were to make way for the satisfaction of meaningful activity. His search for other and more worthwhile work ceased. It was a delight to him to confirm young theologians in their calling in the hard-pressed Church and share with them, not only his gifts, but everything he possessed. Those students who were meeting him for the first time were surprised to find that the director of their seminary was always ready to make himself available"* (2000:341).

The candidates were first housed in Zingst in cabins, but after a few months they were moved to Finkenwalde, which would be the permanent premises of the seminary (Bethge 2000:347).

Bethge explains the curriculum and routines in great detail. The daily routine set out for the students at the seminary was, in German tradition, strict, systematic and intense. This routine included worship sessions, communal meals, private meditation and assigned theological work, which included Homiletics, studies regarding the Ministry and Church, as well as in depth study of the Confessional Writings (Bethge 2000:361-365). The seminary required a very high level of self-discipline, as well as spiritual discipline from all participants.



Within the introduction of the recently published '*DBWE, Vol 15: Theological education underground: 1937 – 1940*', Victoria J Barnett explains that, although a great amount of Bonhoeffer's lecture notes and theological writings from this period were lost, he communicated regularly with seminarians in the form of circular letters that contained a window into the world of underground theological education and the troubling period (Bonhoeffer, *DBWE Vol 15*, 2012:3-4).

It was at Finkenwalde that Bonhoeffer produced '*Nachfolge*', first translated into English under the title '*The Cost of Discipleship*'. He continually worked on the manuscript as he lectured and added and removed complete sections up until the last moment before the manuscript had to be sent to the press (Bethge 2000:369).

'*Discipleship*' is one of Bonhoeffer's most renowned writings. The opening line of the book presents a term that became synonymous with Bonhoeffer and his theology: 'cheap grace'. Bethge notes that this concept, although essential in the writings, was however not the *crux* of the manuscript. Bethge presents the thesis of '*The Cost of Discipleship*' as follows;

*"Basically what Bonhoeffer was seeking to do in this book was to reaffirm the elusive concept of 'faith' in all its implications"* (Bethge 2000:372).

Already in 1935, the work being done at Finkenwalde was declared illegal. In 1937, Martin Niemöller was arrested and on 28 September, a mere two years after its creation, the Finkenwalde seminary was shut down by the Gestapo (Bethge 2000:387).

Finkenwalde gave Bonhoeffer the chance to truly explore the meaning and power of community in faith, which lead to the booklet entitled '*Life Together*' (Munich 1939;

DBWE Vol 5). Bethge tells that this booklet was the most widely read of all of Bonhoeffer's books (Bethge 2000:387).

A dark atmosphere was brewing in Germany. Between 1938 and 1940, many of the men from Finkenwalde were called to the military by conscription. More than half of them did not survive the war.

In 1938, Bonhoeffer received a summons to report for military service in May of the next year. His father was able to obtain a year extension for him. Bonhoeffer travelled to England for five months (Bethge 2000:540), while pondering his future.

In Germany, 1939 marked a dark year; Karl Barth was expelled from the country, Martin Niemöller was in a concentration camp, and thousands of clergy had found themselves imprisoned. Bonhoeffer was opposed to the pending war and concerned for the church in Germany. On 2 June 1939, Bonhoeffer left Germany for Union Seminary in New York again (Bethge 2000:553).

While in New York, Bonhoeffer's thoughts remained constantly on those in Germany. He was concerned for them and concerned for the work of the church (Bethge 2000:557-559). Mataxas presents numerous entries out of Bonhoeffer's dairy 'The way to freedom', that exclaim his restlessness in America. Bonhoeffer writes:

*"It is almost unbearable ... Today God's Word says, "I am coming soon" (Rev 3:11). There is no time to lose, and here I am wasting days, perhaps weeks. In any case, it seems like that at the moment. Then I say to myself again, "it is cowardice and weakness to run away here now." Will I ever be able to do any really significant work here? Disquietly political news from Japan. If it becomes unsettled now I am definitely going back to Germany. I cannot stay*

*outside [Germany] by myself. That is quite clear. My whole life is still over there” (2010:332).*

It is clear that Bonhoeffer was struggling with the decision that he almost seemed forced into. His time in America was spent playing his options over in his head, with all his countrymen and the church in Germany featuring brightly in his mind. Bethge quotes the following words that Bonhoeffer wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr:

*“I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative if either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.” (Bethge 2000:559, cf Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001:210)*

He set sail for Germany on 7 July 1939 (Bethge 2000:565) and on 1 September that year, Germany was at war.

Bonhoeffer had been opposing the changes in Germany from the pulpit for many years, but in 1940 he opened a new chapter in his story of resistance. He was soon ordered by Nazi Authorities to restrain from speaking in public, he had to report his activities to authorities and later he was banned from publishing.

Bonhoeffer took up an offer by his brother in law, Hans von Dohnanyi (husband to Christine Bonhoeffer and son of pianist and composer Ernő Dohnanyi), to work for

the Abwehr (the German military intelligence organisation). Hans von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer, and a list of other men including Dr. Joseph Müller, Hans Oster, Wilhelm Canaris, Klaus Bonhoeffer (Bonhoeffer's brother), Rüdiger Schleicher (Bonhoeffer's brother in law) and F.J Perels started conspiring against Hitler and the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer travelled outside of Germany on official business for the Abwehr, but used this opportunity to spread the news about the conspiracy. Bonhoeffer soon became a double-agent. Bethge describes Bonhoeffer's entrance into a double life and explains how

*"... the chance that the Abwehr gave him to live as a civilian set him free at the same time to go on doing what he had felt called to do for the last ten years: stand by the young theologians even in the existing conditions of war, and to work at theology himself"* (Bethge 2000:606).

This freedom to live as a civilian had implications for Bonhoeffer's personal love life as well and on 17 January 1942, Bonhoeffer proposed to Maria von Wedemeyer, the granddaughter of Ruth von Wedemeyer, a close friend. Bethge recounts Bonhoeffer's fascination with his fiancée as follows:

*"Maria von Wedemeyer embodied for him what he had learnt to value in the Kleist relatives at Kieckow and Klein-Krossin – alert wisdom, freshness, nobility, and poise that made her more equal than equal dealing with life's gifts as well as its burdens"* (2000:693).

A number of letters exchanged between the two were later published as 'Love Letters from Cell 92' (1994).

The conspirators soon came to the realisation that the only way for Germany to move forward was to end Hitler's rule of terror. Consequently, they came to the decision to partake in an attempt on Hitler's life. Canaris, Hans von Dohnanyi, Henning von Tresckow and Fabian Schlabredorff put together a plan to place a suitcase loaded with explosives on Hitler's plane on 13 March 1943. However, their planned assassination failed and they were forced back to the drawing board (Bethge 2000:685). On 21 May, the conspirators planned another attack in which Major von Gersdorff would offer his life, but this attempt was once again unsuccessful (Bethge 2000:685).

The conspirators were hunted down by the Nazi authorities; Bonhoeffer was arrested on 5 April 1943 and sent to Tegel prison. Bonhoeffer made the best of the terrifying situation and befriended the guards. This allowed him to send letters home to his family, his fiancée and to his closest friend, Eberhard Bethge. These letters were an array of personal greetings, spiritual and intellectual reflections on his life and his situation, as well as theological writings that included his '*Ethics*', which he had been working on since 1939/1940 (Bethge 2000:620), (Bonhoeffer, DBWE, Vol 8: Letters and Papers from Prison), but which he was not able to complete and publish before his death.

In 1945, on 7 February, Bonhoeffer was moved to Buchenwald concentration camp. From here, he was moved to Regensburg, then to Schönberg and finally, on 8 April, to Flossenbürg. On 5 April, at Hitler's midday conference, he had already ordered the annihilation of all conspirators. Bonhoeffer was killed by Nazi officials on 9 April 1945, together with Oster, Sack, Canaris, Störnck and Gehre. Hans von Dohnanyi

was executed on the same day in Sachsenhausen. On 23 April, Klaus Bonhoeffer, Schleicher and Perels were executed in Berlin (Bethge 2000:841).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed only a few weeks before Hitler committed suicide (30 April 1945) and Germany surrendered to the Allied forces in early May 1945. Maria von Wedemeyer would only receive the news in June, while Bonhoeffer's parents would only learn of his death in July through the BBC (Bethge 2000:833).

A little more than nine months before his death, on 21 July 1944, Bonhoeffer writes a letter addressed to Bethge from Tegel prison. The words he puts to ink offer an interesting reflection on a life lived in a time of turmoil, by a man searching only to live righteously and have his actions reflect his convictions. In the end, his determined faith rises as a telling witness of a life extraordinary:

*"I discovered later, and I am still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priest type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problem, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think is faith; that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45!)" (Bonhoeffer, DBWE 8, 2001:542).*

Bonhoeffer's dedication to righteous living lies within his story like a golden thread within his path towards resistance. His sociological, theological and psychological

formation shaped a brave man, whose dedication and vigour will not soon be forgotten. Bonhoeffer's resistance of the Nazi Regime, although not uncontested, bears testimony to his convictions; his willing participation in the attempted assassination of Hitler stands as faith (in what he deemed to be the righteous path) in motion.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Towards understanding Bonhoeffer's resistance:

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This chapter will explore the possible motivations behind Dietrich Bonhoeffer's resistance, as well as what and who he resisted. Also: what methods did Bonhoeffer employ to resist that which he opposed? What reactions have there been to his chosen path of resistance after his death? How has South Africa perceived his resistance, during and after Apartheid?

The following sources will mainly be used to consider these questions: Eric Metaxas's new biography '*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*', Larry Rasmussen's '*Reality and Resistance*', John A. Moses' '*The Reluctant Revolutionary: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's collision with Prusso-German History*', as well as Stephen R. Haynes's '*The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*' (2004).

### **Who and what did Bonhoeffer resist?**

Although Bonhoeffer came into conflict with a great array of ideologies, as well as institutions during his life and theological career, were these collisions not all a product of his determined resistance against fundamentally one concept: unjust oppression? Bonhoeffer proclaimed these words during a sermon on Two Corinthians 12:9 in London in 1934:

*"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its apologia for the weak. I feel that*



*Christianity is rather doing too little in showing these points than too much. Christianity has adjusted itself to the worship of power. It should give much more offence, more shock to the world, than it is doing. Christianity should take a much more definite stand for the weak than to consider the potential moral right of the strong"* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 13 2007:403).

Already here, Bonhoeffer's strong conviction to 'act out' against injustice in the name of Christianity comes to light. What exactly did Bonhoeffer feel so passionate about opposing?

To understand what Bonhoeffer was up against, one has to possess a basic understanding of the evil of Nazism. Moses draws on two fundamental elements that Bonhoeffer apposed, the Nazi Regime and the anti-Semitism forced on the German community.

## **The Nazi Regime**

### *The Führer vs the Verführer*

Moses first considers 'Leadership'. In Germany, the *Führer* had great power and was usually an effortlessly accepted sovereign authority. Bonhoeffer already alluded to his dislike of the easy acceptance of such a leader in his radio sermon just after Hitler had come to power, playing on the words *Führer* and *Verführer* (Bethge 2000:260) with the latter directly translated as 'seducer'. According to Moses, Bonhoeffer saw Hitler as the incarnation of evil and regarded his words as heresy on two accounts: it was not true to German political tradition and stood in opposition to the law of God (Moses 2009:106).

### *The Jewish Question*

Secondly, Moses considers 'The Jewish Question'. Bonhoeffer was not only opposed to Hitler as a ruler and the image that the Third Reich created of him as the God-willed leader of Germany who should not be questioned, Bonhoeffer was in fact also deeply plagued by Hitler's oppression and dehumanising treatment of the Jewish population of the nation.

This conviction, however, distanced Bonhoeffer slightly from the large majority of the church, who was convinced by Hitler's colourful persuasions, and that connected the church's longstanding complication of anti-Semitism with Hitler's pursuit for a pure Germany.

Moses notes that the hostility being expressed by the German Christian public towards the Jewish community was not a new phenomenon, but rather one that could be traced back to the New Testament and was very apparent in European history since the Roman Empire (2009:46).

Bonhoeffer saw past race and racial segregation and considered the humanity of the Jewish population. This can easily be attributed to his family upbringing. Bonhoeffer's grandmother Julie Tafel Bonhoeffer would disregard the boycott of 1933 and his sister Sabine would marry Gerhard Leibholz, a Jewish man.

*"Bonhoeffer, reacting to the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany as he did, with very little support from his coreligionists, overthrew centuries of Christian prejudice and theological debate on the role of the Jews in the history of the church. In doing so he had built a theological bridge for Christian Jewish reconciliation" (Moses 2009:46).*

It is important to understand Bonhoeffer's resistance not only in a social or political framework, but certainly within a theological framework as well. Bonhoeffer's Christology was undeniably at the heart of his path towards resistance, as well as this being the cornerstone of his perception of the Church and thus, his ecclesiology. As will be elaborated on in the following section, Bonhoeffer had an intensely Christocentric ethic, based on 'Christ for others'. His resistance was never selfish or aimed at gaining fame in particular circles; it was clearly and intensely shaped and formed by his desire to serve the will of God absolutely and to defend those who cannot defend themselves. Bonhoeffer focused on 'Christ as the Person for others' and the 'Church as the church for others'. It is necessary then to consider what built and shaped up Bonhoeffer's theological, as well as sociological perceptions, that enabled him to be so strongly motivated, passionately inspired and energised to intensely defend the weak, oppressed and downtrodden in the way that he chose.

## **Possible motivations to resist**

Bethge recounts a telling statement of Bonhoeffer's convictions from a letter to Reinhold Niebuhr, explaining Bonhoeffer's return to Germany:

*"I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people"* (Bethge 2000:559).

This section will consider some of the elements that could possibly have lead Dietrich Bonhoeffer to the point of acting in resistance against political power.

Elizabeth Raum notes that, although there were many other groups actively resisting the Third Reich, namely *'The White Rose'* and *'The Kreisau Circle'*:

*"Bonhoeffer had come to believe that only Hitler's death would end the horrors, He recognized that his ability to serve the church in the future was already compromised, but that Hitler's assassination was necessary, he did not doubt"* (Raum 2002:129).

A number of possible motivations for Bonhoeffer's conviction, which sent him into an integral process of discernment and a search for righteous living, which ultimately led him to lay his life on the line for what he considered to be justice, will be identified.

Although Bonhoeffer had started resisting the church's actions in Germany at an early age, as well as its engagement with society and its compliance with the German Government, this piece will more closely consider Bonhoeffer's resistance against the Nazi Regime. A leading question will therefore be: What motivation did Bonhoeffer have to be mobilised from his resistance within the church to his resistance against the Nazi Government and the *'Führer'*, Adolf Hitler, which would ultimately lead Bonhoeffer to participate in a conspiracy against this government and its leader? This section, as the preceding and following parts of the study, will not try to deliver an exhaustive study or evaluation of Bonhoeffer's resistance, but rather partake in an inquiring journey towards understanding. As Visser 't Hooft, once Secretary of the Provisional World Council of Churches, asks:

*"How did it come about that Dietrich Bonhoeffer took that great decision to be actively involved in preparing the events which had the explosive effect on 20 July 1944?"* (An Act of Penitence 1966:193).

There are varying opinions on what channelled Bonhoeffer's drive towards his ultimate resistance of the German Government. To investigate this journey that Bonhoeffer undertook towards action, it is vital to consider what the contributing factors were that were present at the time of his decision and in the years leading up to it. This could be approached by considering Bonhoeffer's formation both as a theologian and an individual. The following section will focus on the role played by Bonhoeffer's life story and the people he encountered in his final path towards resistance. John Moses' book '*The Reluctant Revolutionary: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Collision with Prusso-German History*' (2009) will be used especially to enrich this discussion.

## **Bonhoeffer's formation**

Moses' approach focuses on Bonhoeffer's formation as an adult and a theologian.

Moses states:

*"An individual's way of comprehending the world is conditioned by where he or she was born, who their parents were, and of course, the peculiarities of the education system"* (2009:28).

The title of his book already suggests his thesis, which presents Bonhoeffer as a product of a combination of influences that were uncontrollable and inherent, which fashioned him into a '*Reluctant Revolutionary*'. This view leads Moses to identifying a list of plausible influences in Bonhoeffer's life that could be translated into motivation for his resistance. The influential figures, situations and events that formed the Germany that Bonhoeffer grew up in are identified as playing an

important role in Bonhoeffer's formation. Moses also considers Bonhoeffer's encounter with the 'New World' through his travels, and his involvement with ecumenical theology of his time.

### **The Church in Germany**

Moses starts this discussion by accenting the influence that Martin Luther's sixteenth century rebellion against the Catholic Church and its papacy had on German history (2009:27). He presents this event as the first step towards solidifying the Protestant Church in German history, culture and thinking.

The next step in his discussion moves to Luther's view of God as a '*mighty fortress*' and '*warrior*', which became imbedded in the mind of the German Protestant. Moses notes that

*"... the God to whom Luther prayed was a 'mighty fortress', certainly a warrior God, and this image was strengthened, indeed raised to a fundamental philosophical principle, in the course of German history" (2009:27).*

Here, Moses refers to events such as the coming down of the Berlin wall and the free elections in East Germany being labelled as a '*Protestant Revolution*' and at the time was said to have been prepared "*under the umbrella of the church*". He continues by stating:

*"Understandably, God could not possibly have been described as a pacifist" (Moses 2009:27).*

This world view that was being fostered by the majority of the German population ensured that the state was seen as God's instrument on earth from a very early stage in German history. It was foremost in service to advance God's purpose for humankind. According to Moses, Hegel, in his position as Royal Prussian State Philosopher,

*"laid the foundation for the ideology of the 'Machtstaat'" (2009:28).*

In Hegel's philosophy of religion, the state became what Moses refers to as the '*secular arm*' of the church. This unique relationship between church and state is emphasised by Moses as noteworthy when attempting to understand German history (Moses 2009:28).

This is the Germany that Dietrich Bonhoeffer grew up in: a Germany with a strong religious and nationalistic focus.

### **Patriotic Germany**

A few years before Bonhoeffer's birth, in the early twentieth century, Germany was as eager as ever to revitalise patriotic vigour and establish itself among the great powers of Europe (Moses 2009:28-31).

In 1914, the outbreak of war was welcomed by "*patriots who unquestioningly understood and supported German imperial expansion as the nation's destiny under God*" (Moses 2009:31). Bonhoeffer's family, although patriotic, were most certainly not uncritically nationalist. Moses mentions the German People's Party, under the leadership of Gustav Stresemann, as a good representation of the Bonhoeffer's political views after the war (2009:31).

Moses' key argument regarding Bonhoeffer's motivation behind his action, is that it finds its roots early on in Bonhoeffer's life, with his family and his resulting foundation.

### **Female figures**

It is interesting at this point to note three female figures in Bonhoeffer's family that played a vital role in his formation as individual and theologian:

#### ***Julie (Tafel) Bonhoeffer***

She was Bonhoeffer's grandmother, who's family, according to Mataxas

*“played a lead role in the democratic movement of the nineteenth century and was devotedly liberal” (2010:7).*

At 90 years of age, Julie Bonhoeffer refused to take part in the 1933 boycott and was not deterred from shopping at her usual stores owned by Jewish merchants (Metaxas 2010:156-157 and Bethge 2000:201). Mataxas notes that Bonhoeffer's grandmother was very active in what he refers to as the '*building field of women's rights*' (Metaxas 2010:74) during her life. He also tells of her medal of the Order of Olga, that she was awarded for building a home for elderly women, as well as a domestic school for girls (Metaxas 2010:74). Bonhoeffer maintained a close relationship with his grandmother and was certainly not in opposition to her actions in 1933. They communicated often in the form of letters, that reveal an intimate



relationship and great similarities in their conception of the world that they lived in. She inspired his interest in Ghandi and his violence opposing ideologies

***Paula (von Hase) Bonhoeffer (Bonhoeffer's mother)***

According to Mataxas, there were two things of the German state that Paula Bonhoeffer was not pleased with in the least. The first was the public education system and the second was the military. Mataxas states that:

*“she subscribed to the maxim that Germans had their backs broken twice, once at school and once in the military” (2010:9).*

These strong convictions lead her to take her teachers examination even before she was married and used this to educate her children herself. The latter of her ailments with the state was unfortunately not under her control and thus, she was forced to live through the trauma of losing a child. Her strong convictions opposing the military and military action certainly had an influence of Bonhoeffer. Might this even have been the starting point of his fascination with pacifism and alternative action to war? According to Mataxas, when the Britain proclaimed war on Germany, the Bonhoeffer's were

*“not oppose to war, but neither would they celebrate it” (2010:21).*

Bonhoeffer's mother fostered a great concern for her fellow Jewish Christians and was quoted asking:

*“What is the church going to do – the church has to do something about the Jewish Christian” (Till 2000).*

### **Sabine (Bonhoeffer) Leibholz**

Bonhoeffer's twin sister married Gerhard Leibholz, a Jewish man. She was forced to uproot her family and moved them to England, where they struggled to adapt. Gerhard Leibholz would later write the first article defending Bonhoeffer and his fellow conspirators (Bethge 2000:797-798). In her book '*The Bonhoeffers: Portrait of a family*' (1971) she describes her close relationship with Bonhoeffer and the contact they had through letters, even while he was in prison. She was an undeniable rock of support for Bonhoeffer, who only wished to one day return the favour.

It is clear that Bonhoeffer's concern for the oppressed was welcomed and fostered in his family. His brother Klaus Bonhoeffer and two of his brothers in law, Hans von Dohnanyi and Rüdiger Schleicher, would all form part of the conspiracy.

During his student days, Bonhoeffer's road to resistance unfolds further with his struggle to agree with the ideas and ideals of his lecturers in Berlin. The plot then moves to Bonhoeffer's first encounters with the works of Karl Barth.

### **Barth**

Moses summarises Barth's influential outcry as follows:

*"... the finite human mind, by means of the discipline of philosophy, no matter how rigorous, could not aspire to know the mind of a transcendent God and predict the schema according to which the deity was working out his design for humanity in history"*(2009:33).

Moses sets this perspective against Bonhoeffer's professors in Berlin (including the likes of Adolf von Harnack and Reinold Seeberg) who, in his opinion, believed that they could in fact realise this "*grandiose project*" as Moses names it (2009:33).

As noted from Bethge's comments earlier, Barth and Bonhoeffer had an interesting relationship. Although Bonhoeffer was undoubtedly greatly inspired by Barth, his curious discernment in thought became clearly visible in this relationship, where he, not overwhelmed by the fame of Barth in the theological sphere, praised Barth upon occasion, yet opposed and challenged him where deemed necessary.

## **Bonhoeffer's Travels**

Moses furthermore mentions, as stated earlier, that Bonhoeffer spent a short period of time travelling during his studies. One of the places he visited, which were highlighted by Bethge as the most influential of these travels, was Rome. Bethge describes it as follows:

*"The fascination exercised by Catholic Rome became a permanent influence on Bonhoeffer's thought. It cannot be said to have diminished his critical awareness, but the universality of the Church and its liturgy in its Roman guise made a tremendous impact on him, even before his encounter with Karl Barth's theology"* (Bethge 2000:59).

Having laid down what he believes to be the basis of Bonhoeffer's motivations for acting in resistance, Moses moves to one more aspect that played a role in Bonhoeffer's formation as a '*reluctant revolutionary*':

Schlingensiepen notes that Bonhoeffer showed a curious openness in his observations which he deems astounding. He continues by stating that:

*“One senses already something of his later ecumenical attitude. Things that repelled most Protestants at the time fascinated him, and thus he developed early on an understanding, which stayed with him, for the nature of the Roman Church”* (2010:24).

Bonhoeffer's experiences in America and in Europe are highlighted as essential to his formation, personally and theologically. According to Moses: *“In the United States, Bonhoeffer's theological and political views were simultaneously confirmed and questioned”* (2009:77). Many of Bonhoeffer's friends, colleagues and acquaintances had a great impact on his theological and personal development and formation. There are, however, three individuals from outside of Germany that have been identified as indispensable to Bonhoeffer's formation by an array of authors writing on the matter. Bonhoeffer himself considered the experiences of his travels as important for education as the classics. The figures that had a remarkable impact on his work and life included:

### **Reinhold Niebuhr**

Bonhoeffer first met Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary (New York) in 1930, when he travelled to America for the first time. Bonhoeffer was taught by Niebuhr concerning *‘Social Ethics’*. It was here that he came to the realisation that he shared, with Niebuhr, the belief that the purpose of the church, as well as that of theology, was indeed to change this world for the better. However, Bonhoeffer found the

'*Christocentrism*' that he was used to lacking in the American theology as taught at Union, as in Niebuhr's lectures, but was none the less intrigued by his new Professors' perspectives and ideologies. Bonhoeffer became close friends with Niebuhr, often staying for visits with Niebuhr and his family at their house. Bonhoeffer would, in the following years, address a number of letters to Niebuhr, requesting his advice. The subject matter that filled the pages of these letters included material of both theological and personal relevance.

### **Mahatma Gandhi**

Bonhoeffer was fond of Mahatma Gandhi's pacifistic ideals and opinions regarding peaceful resistance. He was adamant to travel to India and meet Gandhi in person. Although Bonhoeffer was honoured with a personal invitation from Gandhi as a result of a request by Bishop Bell, he was never able to take up the much sought after opportunity. Bethge writes that Bonhoeffer's fascination needed to be included in his biography, as it had such a great influence on him in years to come (Bethge 2000:74). Bonhoeffer wrote the following words to his grandmother, regarding his fascination with Gandhi's philosophies:

*"In your place I should try some time or other to get to know the contrasting world of the east, I am thinking of India, Buddha and his world"* (Bethge 2000:74).

Mataxas notes that in reply to Bonhoeffer's letter, his grandmother offered to pay for his visit, as she found it to be an advisable experience (Metaxas 2010:47).

### **Bishop Bell of Chichester**

If Niebuhr inspired Bonhoeffer's theological inquiry into the undeniable social responsibility of the church, and Gandhi inspired Bonhoeffer's journey towards finding a method of political resistance that would allow him to lay his head to rest at night, then Bishop Bell inspired Bonhoeffer's need to merge the two journeys and find a way to blend them into one ideal. Bell played a very important role in much of Bonhoeffer's formation as a resistor.

### **Frank Fisher**

Albert Franklin "Frank" Fisher was an African American man, originally from Alabama, who befriended Bonhoeffer. Fisher invited Bonhoeffer to a service at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. He had received this congregation as his social work assignment when he joined the Union seminary in 1930. Bonhoeffer's experiences in Harlem and his friendship with Fisher was undoubtedly an influential force that Bonhoeffer would not easily shake. Mataxas explains that Bonhoeffer's interaction with the African American community of Harlem accentuated an idea that he had been observing in America:

*"the only real piety and power that he had seen in the American church seemed to be in the churches where there were a present reality and past history of suffering" (2010:110).*

Josiah Young writes in his '*No Difference in the Fare*' of Bonhoeffer's acceptance into the African American community and how, in his opinion, Bonhoeffer discovered

a community at Harlem that still understood what obedience to God meant (1998:34).

Schlingensiepen notes the extreme importance Frank Fischer and Bonhoeffer's experiences in Harlem had on his formation as a pastor and theologian, and one day a resistor:

*"It was Frank Fisher who made these experiences (visits to Harlem) possible for Bonhoeffer, and they were among the most important of his year in America, perhaps the most important of all to him. Almost every Sunday, and also during the week, he could be found at the Abyssinian Baptist Church on West 138<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, where he taught a Sunday school class. He took part in countless discussions and in excursions with the church youth. Ruth Zerner, an American who worked at the same church in the 1960's, found that a number of the church members still remembered the blond pastor from Germany who had been part of their congregation 30 years earlier" (2010:65).*

Paul Lehmann, a friend Bonhoeffer made while in America, describes a certain contrast in Bonhoeffer's being; he presents him as a man who was both conservative and, at the same time, had revolutionary tendencies (Paradox of Discipleship 1964:44). His formation as child and student can surely be credited for this 'contrast', which, according to Lehmann, enabled Bonhoeffer to be deeply influenced by both strict German Theological tradition and the more liberal theology showing its face in America.

## Theology, specifically Christology, and ethics

Larry Rasmussen, in his book entitled '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*' (1972) chooses to examine three fragments that, according to him, occurred simultaneously during Bonhoeffer's path towards resistance:

1. Resistance activity
2. Theological reflection
3. Ethical decisions

(Rasmussen 1972)

He approaches the matter in a systematic way, first by clarifying the centres of Bonhoeffer's resistance activity (both theological and ethical), then by investigating Bonhoeffer's pacifism set against the theologian's endorsing of tyrannised, and lastly, by producing a critical review of the accentuated aspects discussed.

Rasmussen places great emphasis on the Christology of Bonhoeffer and the importance that this specific Christology played in Bonhoeffer's actions as recorded. He describes Bonhoeffer's resistance as

“the existential playing out of Christological themes. Changes and shifts in his [Bonhoeffer's] Christology were at the same time changes and shifts in the character of his resistance” (1972:15).

Rasmussen's thesis pertaining to Bonhoeffer's Christology forming a central part in his being, thought pattern and worldview is supported by an array of authors. He especially lays emphasis on the conception of Christian responsibility, as well as the



notion of ‘*Christ for others*’ (Rasmussen 1972). Geoffrey B. Kelly writes the following in his book entitled ‘*Liberating Faith: Bonhoeffer’s message for today*’:

*“Bonhoeffer’s life of faith, like his whole understanding of Christian spirituality, was thoroughly centred in the person of Jesus Christ. For him, Christ was the very embodiment of what it meant to live as a believing, loving Christian within a community. His question from prison “Who is Christ really for us today?” reveals his lifelong concern to discover the presence of Christ, not simply in the people who would enter his life or who would command his compassion, but also in the historical events that had led him to prison, a willing conspirator against an unjust regime. Somehow amid the loneliness and suffering he experienced in the work of the resistance, there stood the solitary figure of Jesus Christ, the “man for others,” who filled Bonhoeffer’s world with meaning and liberated him to take part in the struggle against the forces of human oppression in both state and church” (Kelly, 1984:85).*

Rasmussen points out that through Bonhoeffer’s written work, sermons and recorded lectures, it is clear that Christ was at the centre of his existence and being. Bonhoeffer’s experience and conception of Christ guided the formation of his ethics and reality. It is after this observation that Rasmussen states that:

*“... precisely the experience of resistance shifts the Christological horizons even though his [Bonhoeffer’s] fundamental theological assertion – Christ the centre of man, nature and history – was presented all the while” (1972:32).*

In this case, the well-known verse taken from Mathew 12:30, “*he that is not with me is against me*”, brings a new understanding of Bonhoeffer’s chosen path of resistance. Rasmussen notes that Bonhoeffer realised early on that Hitler did not

share in his view of Christ as centre of humanity, nature and history, and thus, was in a position of opposition. Bonhoeffer was thus forced with a choice, and if he was to be with Christ and 'for others', he was to resist the Third Reich and their deconstructive actions. As Bonhoeffer's journey of resistance continued, "*the controlling motif of being there for others*", as Rasmussen refers to it (Rasmussen 1972:37), did not dim but was rather strengthened. He continues:

*"... [the controlling motif] developed and grew forceful, especially under the rubrics of responsibility, deputyship, acceptance of guilt, and freedom. The development is one of ethical intensification; that is, Christian action and its ground are Bonhoeffer's preoccupations throughout."*

In Ethics, Bonhoeffer writes:

*"One's task is not to turn the world up-side down, but to do what is necessary at the given place and with a due consideration of reality"* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004: 233).

It is also further on in '*Ethics*', that Bonhoeffer turns to the subject of the acceptance of guilt (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 1, 1998:241). Rasmussen comments that once again the most important fact is the Christological one.

*"Jesus did not seek first of all to be good or to preserve his innocence. Rather, he freely took upon himself the guilt of others. Responsible men should do the same"* (Rasmussen 1972:51).

The following passage records clearly Bonhoeffer's thoughts regarding the meaning of true acceptance of guilt in relation to responsible living, within his Christocentric existence and reality:

*“When a man takes guilt upon himself in responsibility, and no responsible man can avoid this, he imputes this guilt to himself and to no one else; he answers for it; he accepts responsibility for it. He does not do this in the insolent presumptuousness of his own power, but he does it in the knowledge that this liberty is forced upon him and that in this liberty he is dependent on grace. Before other men the man of free responsibility is justified by necessity; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience; but before God he hopes only for mercy”* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 1, 1998:248).

Rasmussen places focus on the last sentence of this piece as what he refers to as Bonhoeffer's rationale for his resistance, which lead him to ultimately participate in the planned assassination of Hitler (Rasmussen 1972:53).

## **Bonhoeffer's methods of resistance**

Bonhoeffer's resistance only truly started to show in 1933. It had been fostered and vested in his early developments as theologian and member of German society, but only in 1933 did he move into what could be deemed active resistance of the political situation in his country. It was in this year that he delivered his previously mentioned radio talk entitled: *'The Younger generation's Changed Concept of the Fuhrer'*. It was also in this year that he wrote *'The Church and the Jewish Problem'*, as well as *'The Aryan Clause'*. Near the end of 1933, Bonhoeffer and Niemöller formed the Pastor's Emergency League.

In 1935 Bonhoeffer accepted the directorship position at the Confessing Church's Seminary in Zingst (later Finkenwald).

A year later, Bonhoeffer was stripped of his authority to teach at University level. In 1937 Finkelwalde was closed by the Gestapo and Niemöller was placed under arrest.

Suddenly the Third Reich had turned into a force to be reckoned with. In 1938 Bonhoeffer was expelled from Berlin. His expulsion, however, led to his meeting with Canaris, Oster, Berk and Sack, the resistance leaders.

When Bonhoeffer was called to conscription, he was confronted with a difficult choice: to either become a conscious objector and to face the wrath of the Nazi regime, or fall in line, take up arms for Germany, and betray himself and his fellow Christians. His father's ability to attain him a one year extension allowed Bonhoeffer the time to decide what lay in his future, and ultimately decide his method of resistance. How would he stay true to the pacifistic ideals he had held dear for so many years? Would he become a conscious objector to the Third Reich and possibly be silenced once and for all? The problem was that Bonhoeffer could not see what the path of pacifism or righteous action would be. How would he fight the violent rule of the Nazi's without resorting to force, considering the circumstances?

Bonhoeffer left Europe and returned to Union Theological Seminary in New York. It was here, however, that he realised that if he chose to stay, he would be denying the call of his country. As noted before, he writes to Reinhold Niebuhr:

*"I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany"* (Bethge 2000:559).

Back in Germany, and after being prohibited to speak in public in 1940, Bonhoeffer was dealt with a third choice, in the form of the Abwehr and join a number of his family members in a resistance conspiracy. This way, Bonhoeffer would not be expected to serve the military on the battlefield, and he could gain support for the resistance amongst the Allied nations.

It is here where Bonhoeffer was forced to truly turn his resistance activity to the social and political realm. Although this period of Bonhoeffer's life is mentioned with great emphasis in the number of biographical writings on Bonhoeffer, there seems to be a lack of information regarding Bonhoeffer's internal process of discernment of action during this time. The only real clues that exist concerning his methodology of discernment are found in '*Ethics*'. Bonhoeffer writes:

*"Intelligence, discernment, attentive observation of the given facts, all these now come into lively operation, all will be embraced and pervaded by prayer. Particular experiences will afford correction and warning. Direct inspirations must in no case be heeded or expected, for this could all too easily lead to a man's abandoning himself to self-deception ... there must be a lofty spirit of sober self-control. Possibilities and consequences must be carefully assessed. In other words, the whole apparatus of human powers must be set in motion when it is a matter of proving what is the will of God. But in all this there will be no room for the torment of being confronted with insoluble conflicts, or for the arrogant notion that one can master every conflict, or even the enthusiastic expectation and assertion of direct inspiration. There will be the belief that if a man asks God humbly God will give him certain knowledge of His will; and then, after all this earnest proving, there will also be freedom to make a real decision, and with it the confidence that it is not man but God*

*himself who, through this proving, gives effect to His will*" (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004:40).

## Discernment

This statement by Bonhoeffer implies that he prescribed to his own layout of ethical behaviour; his actions were taken as action in line with the will of God. His method of discernment thus led to his conviction that his participation in the conspiracy was indeed the will of God. Does this then imply that Bonhoeffer believed wholeheartedly that he had gained enough knowledge to not object to the planned assassination attempts on Hitler, as this was what he believed to be the will of God? Bonhoeffer writes later in *'Ethics'*:

*"... Christ remains the only giver of forms. It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004:80) ... For indeed it is not written that God became an idea, a principle, a programme, a universally valid proposition or a law, but that God became a man. (2004:85) ... participation in this reality [the divine and cosmic reality given in Christ] is the true sense and purpose of the enquiry concerning good. (2004:195)... After Christ has appeared, ethics can have but one purpose, namely, the achievement of participation in the reality of the fulfilled will of God ... (2004:212)."*

It is clear, not only from Bonhoeffer's writings, as above, but from his chosen path of resistance, that Bonhoeffer was committed not solely to a religious life, but rather to a life of faith in action.

## Participation

Through Bonhoeffer's commitment to a life of faith in action reality becomes participation. This is key to Bonhoeffer's theology. By relating to Christ, in faith, the responsible human being becomes a bearer of the other and so doing learns to react and interact with others, in reality (participation). Rasmussen comments as follows:

*"The moral agent is thus not related to principles, programs, virtues, ideals, laws, or any other abstractions claiming guidance for the moral life. He is related to the person who prods, leads, enables, encourages, forms, and justifies"* (Rasmussen 1972:156).

Bonhoeffer's method of resistance went beyond choosing a suitable path for his situation, or deciding what he personally believed would be the best for Germany. Bonhoeffer's method was a profoundly Christologically-based participation in the acceptance of guilt. He mimicked Christ' acceptance of the guilt of all humankind, by taking it onto himself, in his own capacity and taking action against it (by suffering crucifixion and ultimately rise victorious over the stronghold of death). Although one could argue for a less theological enquiry into his methods, ignoring his theological convictions would most certainly lead to a misunderstanding of Bonhoeffer and, therefore, his resistance.

However, Rasmussen criticises Bonhoeffer's method of acceptance of guilt as he sees flaws in the theory. He notes the lack of distinction between the guilt that Christ took upon him and the guilt that Bonhoeffer felt impelled to take upon him. Christ had to participate in the guilt of humanity, although he was not related to the violation of divine law that occurred and caused the existence of said guilt. Bonhoeffer's

acceptance of guilt, however, according to Rasmussen, could only show a '*relative innocence*', because Bonhoeffer, as a man, German and Christian, played a part in the conditions that brought on the guilt of Germany and the church (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 6, 2004:54-58).

Lastly, Rasmussen comments that:

*"Too little is said by Bonhoeffer to work carefully through this set of issues for his Christology, ethics, and understanding of resistance. But it does seem clear that one way or another the nest of issues around guilt and Christology is a very entangled one indeed. It is minimally a nest of unanswered questions and perhaps a serious Christological confusion, with ramifications for Bonhoeffer's very decision to join the underground"* (Rasmussen 1972:173).

## **Some responses to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's path of resistance**

Considering the events of the past decade, we as members of a twenty-first century society have been forcefully confronted by the discussion concerning fighting force with force, in search of liberating some from oppression by the other. In the aftermath of the recent invasion of Iraq, the assassination of Osama Bin Laden and the violent overthrow of Libya, to mention but a few examples, we have, in a sense, been slightly vaccinated against the shock of planned assassination during a situation of conflict. A few theologians consider Bonhoeffer's chosen path of resistance from out of this contemporary perspective.



## Stephan R. Haynes: The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon

In *'The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon'* (2004), Haynes assesses the reception that Bonhoeffer has received by interpreters in the ages following on his death in 1945. Haynes considers Bonhoeffer to be presented as a seer, a prophet, an apostle, a bridge and lastly, as a saint.

Haynes opens his book by explaining that Bonhoeffer has reached a certain level of popularity in the years following his death at the hands of the Third Reich. He explains that:

*"His heroic figure is magnified by Bonhoeffer's involvement in the anti-Nazi resistance and his death as a result of Nazi brutality. Since the modern imagination has made Hitler the epitome of Evil, Bonhoeffer the anti-Hitler naturally assumes the mythic role of warrior in the service of Good"* (Haynes 2004:5).

Therefore, the more the Nazi government and the agents of the Holocaust are 'demonised', the more Bonhoeffer's resistance thereof is exalted, especially in Christian Protestant tradition.

Bonhoeffer's popularity has resulted in his name being attached to a great array of mainstream theological movements. These include, as Haynes lists them:

*"orthodoxy, neo-orthodoxy, theology of secularity, political and liberal theologies, religious pluralism and postmodernism"* (Haynes 2004:10).

The greatest contribution that Haynes brings to the table is his discussion of Bonhoeffer as a Protestant saint. He notes that Bonhoeffer is featured in nearly every publication relating to the identification of '*modern saints*' (Haynes 2004:127).

Haynes includes the following table to highlight the hagiographical attributes in Bonhoeffer's life that have set some inclined towards revering him as a Protestant saint. It is certainly worthwhile repeating it here:

<b><u>Themes and Episodes</u></b>	<b><u>Hagiographic Feature</u></b>
Pastors and academics in mother's family Father's stature as prominent psychiatrist Large home, servants, etc	Fortunate Birth
Achievement in sports, music Intellectual prodigy	Notable Childhood
Decision to study theology 1920 "In that case I shall reform [the church]!" Holy week in Rome 1924 "Conversion" 1931 Church Struggle 1933 - Return to Germany 1939	Commitment to the Church
The poor in Barcelona 1928 "Negros" in Harlem 1930-1931 Indignant departure from a restaurant (Frank Fisher) Working-class youth in Berlin 1931 Jews in Germany 1933	Concern for Socially Marginal

Julie Tafel Bonhoeffer's defiance of Nazi boycott April 1933

Outrage at the pogrom of Nov 1938

Involvement in "Operation 7"

Contribution to "Chronicle of Shame"

Immediate opposition to Nazism

Defining conflict

Radio Address critical of the 'Führerprinzip' Feb 1933

Opposition to 'German Christians' and Confessing Church

Confrontation with Gestapo 1933

Work for the Resistance 1938-1945

Censure

Suffering or persecution

Prohibited from teaching 1936-

Prohibited from residing in Berlin 1938-

Prohibited from preaching 1940-

Prohibited from speaking or publishing in Germany 1941-

Arrest and imprisonment 1943-1945

London 1933-35 "into the wilderness for a while"

Liminality or exile

Finkenwalde & Collective pastorates 1935-39

New York 1939

*Disguised* existence as double agent

Public Hitler salute at café June 1940

Incognito' of death as enemy of state 1945

Devotion to work

Chastity

Engagement to Maria von Wedemeyer

Prison demeanour

Courage in the face of death

Serenity during Allied bombing raid

Refusal to escape

Death '*entirely submissive to the will of God*'

Prison writings

Final Testament

Last words: '*For me this is the end, but also the beginning of life*'

(Haynes 2004:40-41)

Although Haynes does not focus clearly on the reception of Bonhoeffer's resistance, he extensively presents the case of Bonhoeffer's popularity, and does so extremely thoroughly. However, it would be naïve to believe that a revolutionary man such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer received only positive reception.

During the last decade, a very interesting debate has once again raised its head: The justification of the killing of one man to save another. This topic has become increasingly relevant in Christian circles following such events as mentioned in the introduction to this section.

### **Ipsita Chatterjea: Bonhoeffer and Moral Resistance**

It might also be valuable to draw on an article by Ipsita Chatterjea '*Bonhoeffer and Moral Resistance*' (1998), where she considers moral resistance as a set of criteria for justifying political resistance. She states that;

*“All political activities have ethical implications. Any attempt to define, examine, or judge political activity must consider the dilemmas of ethics and judgement and how these dilemmas shape or affect the timing of action”* (1998:1).

Chatterjea presents a four part model for the consideration of moral resistance, formulated by her previous research on Bonhoeffer and Camus. When slotting Bonhoeffer's life and witness into the four areas of inquiry, it presents a unique case of his resistance of the Third Reich.

Firstly, Chatterjea makes it clear that self-transcendence does not refer to an approval of violence vindicated by self-sacrifice, but rather;

*“The impetus to act for a just cause, and accept the consequences of such action”* (1998:15).

The important vantage point for her here is Bonhoeffer's concept of grace and discipleship, spoken of in *‘The Cost of Discipleship’*. It is this dedicated discipleship that Chatterjea summarises as;

*“the acts of Christian conscience and the acceptance of the secular consequences of such acts”* (1998:16).

Importantly, she notes that although one commits to actions in discipleship, one has to face the consequences of these actions not by his/her own standards, but by the standards of the world. Bonhoeffer's consequences by the standard of the Third Reich in 1945, was death.

Secondly, Chatterjea considers credibility of resistance in respect to its value for greater humankind. She classifies a moral resistor by stating that;

*“An actor agent of moral resistance has power and credibility only if it demonstrates a commitment to develop and maintain a state that is projective and inclusive of all parts of society” (1998:21).*

Here, she considers Bonhoeffer’s notion of the Christian community and what he understood as his responsibility towards his neighbours. She states that she draws from Bonhoeffer’s convictions regarding responsibility to others, guided by his commitment to the Christian community that it is arguable that if the government steps out of their boundaries and partake in devastating and destructive acts against community (she exemplifies the unlawful persecution of its members), then the Christian will have a basis for disobedience, in light of the greater good.

Thirdly, Chatterjea notes that Bonhoeffer was caught in a paradox; by taking up action against what she deems a *“morally bankrupt government”* (1998:24), he himself was engaging in morally questionable action. It is clear that, to Bonhoeffer, violent action was an absolute extreme that would only be deemed necessary in utmost conditions. Chatterjea notes Bonhoeffer’s *‘Ethics’* where he speaks of disorderly strategies as an extreme measure to be commenced to restore ethical order to a situation where ethical norms have been abandoned (1998:25; cf Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 1, 1996:25).

She concludes this section by stating that

*“Bonhoeffer is preoccupied with justifying a breach of law and does so by appealing to necesidad, conscience, freedom of responsibility, and deputyship” (1998:25).*

Lastly, Chatterjea notes that although Bonhoeffer realised from early on that the Nazi's were dangerous, he opted to resist them through the formation of the Confessing Church at first. As various attempts to remove Hitler using legal mechanisms failed, she states that it seemed to have become clear to Bonhoeffer that only illegal tactics remained (1998:27).

Again, she draws on his '*The Cost of Discipleship*' and '*Ethics*' concerning what he deemed righteous action in the face of injustice and his concern regarding the legitimacy of government. Ultimately, she summarises Bonhoeffer's position by stating that:

*"Bonhoeffer suggests organizational independence between the Church and the Government, and that the individual needs to take it upon herself to serve God through interaction with the Christian community that suffers in this world in service to others and that the immediacy of people within a Christian community in service to God had the potential to counter the threat of organization"* (1998:29).

Chatterjea's inquiry presents a summative consideration of Bonhoeffer's resistance. Bonhoeffer's story fits her model like a glove.

It highlights Bonhoeffer's continuously apparent desire for righteous living, in line with his commitment of discipleship that comes to the fore repeatedly within his life story and surfaces in discussions concerning his resistance of the Third Reich.

## **Raymond A. Schroth: Bonhoeffer was wrong**

A short article in the national Catholic Reporter expresses a different reception of Bonhoeffer, the often named Protestant saint. This article by Raymond A. Schroth is written on 27 January 2006, in reaction to the growing Bonhoeffer “cult” and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bonhoeffer’s birth. The article is bluntly titled ‘*Bonhoeffer was wrong!*’.

Schroth notes the cruelty of the Third Reich and the inhumane activity of Hitler, but poses the question of whether this allowed Bonhoeffer the right to decide whether Hitler is worthy of life. He concludes the article by stating bluntly:

*“Except in civil disobedience, where one protests an unjust law and takes public responsibility, whenever anyone with power – president or priest – starts to go above, outside or around the law and gives himself a license to kill, beware”* (Schroth 2006).

Although the article is only a few hundred words long, it presents a powerful argument. The discussion could be greatly expanded when one starts considering the definition of civil disobedience and justification thereof. It is easy to question whether Bonhoeffer’s resistance was not in itself a mere protest against an unjust law (or a number of them) and his way of ‘taking public responsibility’.

## **Stanley Hauerwas: Performing the Faith**

In 2004, the acclaimed theologian Stanley Hauerwas’s book entitled: ‘*Performing The Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence*’ (2004) was published.



Already in the introduction, he states his view concerning the role of the church in the world as follows:

*“What the church owes the world is what the church has been given, that is, the privilege to be a community capable of confessing our sins before God and one another”* (2004:14).

He considers Bonhoeffer’s theology and actions from this perspective. It is only the first parts of this book that considers directly Bonhoeffer’s political thought and actions related to his resistance.

Hauerwas highlights a conflict in Bonhoeffer’s life between his belief of the forgiveness of sin as the bases of peace and his willing participation in the plot against Hitler. He questions to what extent Bonhoeffer’s political acts should be connected to his Christian convictions. In the third chapter, Hauerwas offers a counter to Bonhoeffer’s performance of his faith by describing true ‘performing of the faith’ as the

*“labour of forgiveness, the peaceable rhetoric of God’s church”* (2004:75).

Although Hauerwas considers Bonhoeffer to be a great theologian, who paved a way towards discovering a rightful place for the Church in the world, as well as within its relationship with the state, unlike many other scholars, Hauerwas feels uncomfortable with Bonhoeffer’s participation in the plot against Hitler’s life and considers it an unnecessary extreme for the church in the world. Hauerwas presents one window of interpretation of Bonhoeffer’s life and work, however many do share his perspective.

To truly move towards an understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance of Nazi Germany, it is essential to consider his plight for justice within our own context. South Africa's dark past is no undisclosed topic, especially in theological circles. The controversial history of the Church in South Africa can also certainly not be denied. Considering what Bonhoeffer's conscious participation in the political situation of Germany meant to the Church in South Africa in the midst of Apartheid, brings forward another perspective to aid in the movement towards understanding Bonhoeffer's resistance.

## **Bringing it home: Bonhoeffer's resistance, South Africa and Apartheid**

John De Gruchy, Nico Koopman and Robert Vosloo all present intriguing discussions of Bonhoeffer's reception in South Africa and the astonishing influence he had on many South Africans (theologians and laymen). Although all three these authors consider Bonhoeffer's reception in South Africa as a whole, the impossibility of separating his resistance from his life, work and influence on others allows for these three authors to supply a vast amount of exciting information regarding the reception of Bonhoeffer's resistance in South Africa.

### **John De Gruchy**

The most prevalent Bonhoeffer scholar in South Africa is certainly John De Gruchy. De Gruchy has over the past few years presented an immense collection of work on Bonhoeffer's influence in South Africa. Eberhard Bethge's visit to South Africa in

1973, which undoubtedly played a vital role in the introduction of Bonhoeffer to the South African audience, was made possible, largely due to De Gruchy.

De Gruchy wrote an article in 1994 for a publication entitled '*Theology and the Practice of responsibility: essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*'. His article is titled '*Christian witness in South Africa in a time of transition*'.

In this article, De Gruchy briefly mentions the connection that existed, before 1994, between the church's struggle in relation to Apartheid and the *Kirchenkampf* in Germany. He then notes that although Apartheid has officially been disbanded, South African Theology in dialogue with Bonhoeffer alternates as circumstance change.

This, however, is not De Gruchy's most comprehensive work on the topic concerned. Already in 1984, he published a book entitled: '*Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue*'.

De Gruchy tackles the topic in five parts: '*Bonhoeffer as Theologian and Witness*', '*Providence and the Shapers of History*', '*The Liberation of the Privileged*', '*Bonhoeffer, Calvinism and Civil Disobedience*' and lastly '*Bonhoeffer and the Relevance of Barmen for today*'.

In the first section he considers Bonhoeffer's reception in South Africa and discusses his theology in general. According to De Gruchy, Bonhoeffer's theology was a hot topic under theologians during the 1960's in South Africa. He attributes this to the quality and individuality of Bonhoeffer's thought, as well as his life. De Gruchy comments that the subsequent rekindling of Bonhoeffer's work

*“injected new life into the debate [on the secularization of Christianity] and sent it in fresh directions” (1984:12)*

Regarding Bonhoeffer's resistance and its relevance in South Africa at the time, De Gruchy comments that the keen interest by theologians and non-theologians in Bonhoeffer's actions in resistance to the Nazi regime were not simple momentous and short lived, but rather abiding interests seeking guidance in an array of situations that demanded frantic discernment. De Gruchy attributes this to Bonhoeffer's truthful life. His intensity and honesty is underlined and praised throughout this section. De Gruchy discusses Bonhoeffer's theology under three headings: *'Troublesome witness to Jesus Christ'*, *'Theologian of the Cross'* and *'Theology in Dialogue with Bonhoeffer'*. The author makes a compelling case for the reader to realise the passion and truthfulness behind Bonhoeffer's convictions, which he translated into actions.

In the second section, De Gruchy discusses the topics of the church's role in the shaping of history and God's wrath and its connection to grace. He then reaches the peak of this discussion by considering the position between resistance and submission.

De Gruchy identifies that to Bonhoeffer and the South African Christian living in Apartheid, there is was a looming problem of discerning action

*“without the support of traditional norms or transcendent guidance” (1984:61).*

De Gruchy rightfully notes that this, however, is also a problem facing the contemporary Christian. He quotes a passage from Bonhoeffer's *'Ethics'*. One phrase stands out:

*“The man who acts in the freedom of his own most personal responsibility is precisely the man who sees his action finally committed to the guidance of God”* (1984:61 cf. Bonhoeffer: DBWE Vol 1, 1998).

De Gruchy deduces from Bonhoeffer that the freedom that an individual has to act responsibly should not be separated from his surrender to God’s activity. Furthermore, he states that humankind is then set free by God to sculpt history “*etsi deus non daretur*” (as if God were not involved) (1984:61).

The discussion is ended off with De Gruchy exclaiming how amazingly clear Bonhoeffer’s faith in the presence and guidance of God is in his writing about prayer (1984:63). He highlights here Bonhoeffer’s writings while in prison as presented in *‘Letters and Papers from Prison’*.

Considering all that has been discussed regarding Bonhoeffer’s life and works, it would be difficult to not agree with de Gruchy that Bonhoeffer indeed sprung his actions in opposition to Nazi Germany from a place between resistance and submission. He acted in resistance on behalf of the responsibility he believed he had in this world and with steadfast commitment to what he believed to be the will of God for this world.

However, De Gruchy does not end the discussion here. There was more in Bonhoeffer’s work and specifically his resistance of Nazi Germany that De Gruchy found relative to the South African context at the time. In the third section, he considers the liberation of the privileged and intriguingly, the liberation from guilt for responsibility. It is import to recall here Bonhoeffer’s poem *‘Stations to Freedom’* that will be discussed at the end of this section. De Gruchy himself highlights how

Bonhoeffer's personal liberation was only one station on his road to freedom. Here De Gruchy states that:

*"The confession of guilt, not simply the confession of sin, was for Bonhoeffer not only the essential prerequisite of healing and reconciliation but the essence of the church's existence and witness" (1984:84).*

It seems that De Gruchy is pointing to an understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance as a response to the guilt he felt regarding the involvement of the Church in the State in Germany that ultimately lead to the oppression of thousands. Although Bonhoeffer fought for the church in Germany to oppose the actions of the German state, even condemn them, from early on, might he have felt guilty for simply not being able to do more to stop the injustice and destruction that Hitler was spreading in the name of God? It seems that De Gruchy is proposing that this guilt propelled Bonhoeffer into his willing participation in the plot against Hitler's life.

De Gruchy makes it clear that in contrast to Hauerwas', in his own opinion:

*"Bonhoeffer's involvement in the political underground and the conspiracy was not a movement away from theology to politics" (1984:85).*

He goes further to describe Bonhoeffer's decision to partake as

*"an act of responsible decision-making on the boundaries of ethics" (1984:85).*

De Gruchy bids that the only way freedom will come for the South African born into privilege is by means of conscious participation in the struggle.

*"Freedom comes only through deeds and not through thoughts taking wing" (1984:87).*

De Gruchy explains that in South Africa at the time there was a great push for conscientious objection. This, however, was a widely debated topic, most famously raised by Dr Alan Boesak at the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches in 1979 (1984:92). It seems that De Gruchy believes that it is concerning this topic that Bonhoeffer's resistance offered the most relevance to the Church in Apartheid South Africa. De Gruchy turns to Larry L. Rasmussen's book '*Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reality and Resistance*' (1972) to conclude:

*"To maintain one's innocence in a setting such as that of the Third Reich, even to the point of not plotting Hitler's death, would be irresponsible action. To refuse to stand with others trying desperately to topple the perpetrators of mass crimes, to refuse to engage oneself in the demands of necessity, would be the selfish act of one who cared for his own innocence, who cared for his own guiltlessness, more than he cared for his guilty brothers"* (1972:51-51).

## **Nico Koopman**

Another South African theologian that has recently engaged Bonhoeffer's legacy in conversation with challenges arising from the South African context is current Dean of Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology, Nico Koopman.

Koopman presented a paper at the International Bonhoeffer Conference in June 2012 in Sweden entitled '*How do we live responsibly? Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the fulfilment of dignity in democratic South Africa*'. Koopman makes an array of interesting comments on the reception of Bonhoeffer's resistance during apartheid but most importantly also after 1994.

Koopman recounts his student days at the University of the Western Cape during the Apartheid years. He remembers pungently the influence Bonhoeffer's theology and own path of resistance had on himself and his fellow students during these trying times. He poetically describes this strong relation felt to Bonhoeffer's work as follows:

*"Bonhoeffer inspired us when we worshipped and prayed together, and looked for a spirituality of liberation. Bonhoeffer inspired us when we were engaged in protest activities like marches, sit-ins, vigils, when we were injured, persecuted, imprisoned, prosecuted, and when we participated in the launch of the United democratic Front (UDF) ..."*

Koopman refers to Beyers Naudé and the relevance he found in Bonhoeffer. He recalled Allan Boesak's captivation with Bonhoeffer's resistance of Hitler and the Nazi regime and he also refers to John de Gruchy and Dirkie Smit's role in serving the reception of Bonhoeffer in academic and church life in South Africa.

He then engages his reader with the work of the now rector of Stellenbosch University, Russel Botman after the release of Nelson Mandela and his argument that (in Koopman's words); *"Bonhoeffer's notion of radical discipleship provides parameters for the challenge of citizenship in a young democracy"*.

All of the above is mentioned by Koopman to illustrate the importance of Bonhoeffer in the history of South Africa, especially during Apartheid. This is where Koopman introduces the topic of his discussion: the undeniable importance of the work of Bonhoeffer in South Africa's quest to live responsibly in new times.

By drawing on Larry Rasmussen's discussion on Bonhoeffer's view of responsibility mentioned previously, Koopman describes responsible living by explaining that as



we respond to God's call and claim upon us, we faithfully answer to God. Thus, we pro-actively respond and anticipate challenges and questions facing contemporary society, and so we also "*envisage the plight, needs and quests of future generations*".

Koopman identifies this responsible living within South Africa today, specifically related to the participation in the quest of the country to build a new society, a society with human dignity at the core of its existence. He notes that when talking about human dignity, one cannot successful carry a conversation without placing 'human dignity' within the context of the integrity of creation

Here Koopman now explores Bonhoeffer's theology as inspiration in living life responsibly, especially in adherence to the actualisation of human dignity. Koopman states that:

*"Although Bonhoeffer did not explicitly or implicitly, and systematically, propagate a specific democratic model, he provided building blocks that are indispensable for a democratic society that enhances human dignity, freedom and justice in the context of the integrity of creation".*

Koopman explores these 'building blocks' that Bonhoeffer's theology presents in three-form. He notes how Bonhoeffer's contribution is strengthened by his ability to use both sociological and theological arguments in his ethical inquiries.

Firstly, he notes that Bonhoeffer offers a communal understanding of human rights that invites the development of second dimension socio-economic and cultural rights, as well as a theological rationale for third dimension developmental and ecological rights. Koopman rightfully states that:

*“The fulfilment of these rights in communal context is urgently sought after in societies like South Africa where so many are excluded politically, culturally and especially socio-economically. In fact, in global contexts the fulfilment of these rights helps us to overcome political, economic and cultural exclusion.”*

Secondly, Bonhoeffer, as highlighted by Koopman, offers inter-related and inter-dependant mandates (marriage, family and friendship; the church; the state as well as labour), which offers assistance to societies that aim to move towards more specific policies and practices of dignity and rights. Koopman places emphasis here on Bonhoeffer's understanding of the complexity of moral living in pluralistic societies, as well as his critical views of the concept of compromise.

Bonhoeffer, according to Koopman, rejects two responses in the face of tension between the ultimate and the penultimate: radicalism and compromise. Koopman argues, however, for the need in some situations for the church to take the approach of compromise (which he relates to the Christian realism approach of theologians like Niebuhr and Oldham), he states though that:

*“These compromises should, however reckon with the imaginative visionary possibilities of the ultimate, with eternity and the immeasurable, and they should not inhibit responsible decisions”.*

Thirdly, Koopman calls for Bonhoeffer's three-fold action of prayer, concrete obedience and waiting upon God. He considers here Bonhoeffer's spirituality and his Christology. Koopmans states that:

*“Bonhoeffer challenges us to a spirituality and a life of prayer that enhances the dawning of a life of human dignity and human rights. We are called upon*

*to remember the impact of prayer on the transformation of individuals and societies, and of our own practices in this regard during apartheid when we prayed for the fall of the apartheid regime”.*

Further, Koopman notes that it is important to realise that Bonhoeffer’s political spirituality and personal piety gave rise to his political activism (thus his resistance). This is an important point that has become visible throughout earlier discussions in this thesis. Koopman refers here to what he calls Bonhoeffer’s “*practice of classical secret discipline ‘disciplina arcani’*”. He states that it is this ‘secret discipline’ that offers protection against the profanities brought on by the participation in a pluralistic public discourse, while at the same time enabling us to participate in this discourse “*in faithfulness to our identity in Jesus Christ*”.

Koopman emphasises that Bonhoeffer’s writings clearly point to his obedient commitment to God, which is parallel to his commitment to the world of God. He also notes poetically that:

*“... Bonhoeffer would not only stress the notion of human rights but also the notion of right humans”.*

The importance of the notion of ‘waiting for the Word’ in Bonhoeffer’s theology is brought to light by Koopman, who stresses that out of a hope that is willing to wait upon God, our actions of obedience spring forth.

In conclusion, he draws on Russel Botman as a valiant example of a man inspired by Bonhoeffer’s theology and witness. Koopman proclaims that Botman, an avid Bonhoeffer scholar, steers the University of Stellenbosch on a path of hope in action, furthering the actualisation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals

(UNMDG) in South Africa and beyond. Koopman emphasises here the assistance that Bonhoeffer's theology and witness offer a South Africa striving towards a society that advances the fulfilment of human dignity.

Koopman's paper tells of South African theologians (including himself) who were personally inspired by Bonhoeffer's chosen path of resistance. He looked to his actions of resistance for a 'spirituality of liberation' during a trying time in South Africa's history. The emphasis here, and the importance to the argument of this thesis, lies in the notion of radical discipleship that South Africans were able to gain from Bonhoeffer, a notion that "*provides parameters for the challenges of citizenship in a young democracy*". Bonhoeffer's theology, life and resistance are hailed by Koopman as the actualisation of human dignity, rejecting the responses of radicalism and compromise. Koopman affirms Bonhoeffer in terms of resistance, but he certainly also affirms the role to take responsibility. Thus Bonhoeffer's actions did not deem him simply as a negative revolutionary or resister, but as a constructive revolutionary. Koopman makes clear that Bonhoeffer's political activism rose out of his political spirituality and personal piety. According to Koopman, Bonhoeffer's resistance presents South Africans with a challenge: to live a life of spirituality and prayer, a life that enhances the origination and actualisation of human dignity and human rights.

## **Robert Vosloo**

One of Koopman's colleagues, Robert Vosloo, also considers Bonhoeffer's reception in South Africa during and after the Apartheid era in his article '*Interpreting Bonhoeffer in South Africa? The Search for a Historical and Methodological*

*Responsible Hermeneutic*. Vosloo provides an interesting discussion on the reception of Bonhoeffer's resistance in post-Apartheid South Africa within the context of considering responsible interpretation of and in response to Bonhoeffer's work, life and resistance. He places focus on the importance of contextualizing the reception of Bonhoeffer's resistance in South Africa.

Vosloo recounts the inspirational role of Bonhoeffer to South Africans during Apartheid, who were wrestling with the question of how they should be responding theologically to the reality that they were facing in an Apartheid South Africa. He also considers the continuation of the above-mentioned engagement with the work and witness of Bonhoeffer in a post-Apartheid South Africa. Most importantly, he notes that one's position (intellectually, culturally, economically, geographically etc.) has a great effect of one's reading of Bonhoeffer and response to his witness.

Vosloo poses four questions as a point of departure for the inquiry: *"Who are we who interpret Bonhoeffer?"*; *"Where are we situated?"*; *"With what audience and goals in mind do we read and interpret Bonhoeffer?"* and *"What does it mean to take the continuity and discontinuity between Bonhoeffer's life, thought and world and that of his modern-day interpreters seriously?"*.

He makes the valid point that to be able to develop a 'responsible historical hermeneutic' for interpreting Bonhoeffer in South Africa today, a reflection and engagement with his interpretation in the past is essential. Thus, before Vosloo guides the reader through his conceptualisation of a 'responsible historical hermeneutic', he first presents an orientation of the interpretation of Bonhoeffer's work and witness in South Africa in the past.

Vosloo recounts the now well-known response to Eberhard Bethge's visit to South Africa by laymen who had attended Bethge's lectures, but had not yet encountered the work of Bonhoeffer to this extent, as encapsulated in Bethge's *'Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr'*, edited by John De Gruchy (1975:26):

*"When did Bonhoeffer visit South Africa? He knows our situation from inside out!"*.

Here he establishes that it was as talk of a confessing church in South Africa started to surface, that Bonhoeffer's influence grew strong and more noticeable.

To continue the discussion, Vosloo draws on, amongst others, Beyers Naudé's story of resistance, John de Gruchy's scholarly work on Bonhoeffer, and Eberhard Bethge's visit to South Africa as key points in orientating his reader concerning the historical reception of Bonhoeffer in South Africa.

Beyers Naudé is highlighted as a man who walked a similar path of inner struggle. Although Vosloo states that Naudé himself specified that, although there were great similarities, the dehumanising reality of Apartheid South Africa was not at the same level of that of Nazi Germany, Naudé was adamant in his conviction that Apartheid was unjust. He is recalled realising the striking parallels his struggle shared with Bonhoeffer's and notes how he was intensely influenced by Bonhoeffer's courage, wisdom and endurance in the name of justice.

*"How, in your opposition to injustice, at what stage do you come to the point where you say, I cannot let this only be done and remain a non-violent struggler. At what stage are you entitled as Christian to turn arms?"* (Hansen, Vosloo, 2006)

Beyers Naudé is a good example of an individual who suffered similar challenges as Bonhoeffer, albeit in different but not unrelated contexts. Vosloo notes that Naudé's role in the church struggle in South Africa was tremendous, yet Naudé never claimed himself to be a theologian. He thus introduces John de Gruchy as Bonhoeffer scholar, introducing his reader to the theological reception of Bonhoeffer during Apartheid.

Not only does John de Gruchy present an impressive array of work on Bonhoeffer's influence in South Africa, but he was also greatly responsible for Eberhard Bethge's visit to South Africa in 1973, which, as mentioned before, played a vital role in the introduction of Bonhoeffer to the South African audience.

De Gruchy edited some of Bethge's lectures presented in 1973 and published in 1975 as *'Bonhoeffer: Exile and Martyr'*. At the back of this book there is an interesting article that Vosloo draws focus to *'A Confessing Church in South Africa? Conclusions from a visit'*. Here, Bethge highlights a number of parallels and difference between Bonhoeffer's context in Nazi Germany and Apartheid in South Africa.

Vosloo states that:

*"De Gruchy's ability to bring Bonhoeffer's life and work into fruitful conversation with challenges arising from the South African context has rightfully contributed to his reputation as the pre-eminent South African Bonhoeffer scholar".*

However, he is quick to point out that, even in De Gruchy's opinion, one should not limit the discussion on Bonhoeffer's influence in South Africa to scholarly activity

alone. Vosloo mentions what he calls the 'remarkable fact' that people from varying social, as well as denominational backgrounds found Bonhoeffer inspirational.

In the 1970's and 1980's, Vosloo recounts the importance of Bonhoeffer's influence in discussions on civil obedience and the church and the state as tension grew in South Africa. He notes that Bonhoeffer's work was brought up regularly in conversations regarding the controversial Kairos Document of 1986. At the end of the 80's, Bonhoeffer was still being drawn on as theologians and Christians wrestled with the issues of guilt confession and forgiveness.

But what about Bonhoeffer post-1994? Vosloo turns to the 1996 International Bonhoeffer Conference held in South Africa and summarises the fruits of the conference as the realisation that South Africans were now facing an array of new challenges that called for a new engagement and interpretation of Bonhoeffer's work and life. The challenges of reconciliation and justice, is said by Vosloo to remain on the agenda in the future of this country. Some theologians thus, were said to have called attention to Bonhoeffer's concepts of 'the other' and 'the boundary' to be considered incorporation with the African notion of 'ubuntu'.

Here an argument is now presented for what Vosloo calls a 'Responsible Historical Hermeneutic' for the interpretation of Bonhoeffer in South Africa. He makes two important claims:

1. South Africa is an extremely diverse country and thus, there is no one specific South African context. Each individual encountering Bonhoeffer's work has a unique 'South African context' that they form part of, with unique struggles and thus, finds unique relevance in Bonhoeffer's work.



2. It is important to understand how Bonhoeffer has been read and appropriated in the past in South Africa.

There are four key concepts Vosloo focuses on when discussing a 'responsible historical hermeneutic'.

Firstly, he considers the need for a vulnerable hermeneutic. The vulnerability mentioned here refers to the incoherence between the audience and Bonhoeffer himself. Vosloo emphasises here that Bonhoeffer is not our contemporary and should not simply be viewed uncritically as that. Vosloo calls for a balance in hermeneutic between being careful not to simply equate Bonhoeffer's historical situation with ours and, at the same time not paralysing any contextual interpretation of his work and witness.

Secondly, he turns to the realistic hermeneutic. The most important realisation here is that Bonhoeffer was a real person living during a real time in history. Thus, when looking at his work, it has to be placed within a specific historical context. Vosloo argues that it is imperative to take the reality of this historical past seriously when interpreting Bonhoeffer's work. He urges the reader or interpreter to be "*driven by the desire to do justice to the past*". The focus for Vosloo, of this 'realistic hermeneutic' is thus, to understand Bonhoeffer in his original historical context.

Thirdly, he discusses a communal hermeneutic. Vosloo warns of the dangers of interpreting ideologies and even theologies by ourselves; he calls for the need of communal reflection and communal interpretation and describes a communal hermeneutic as:

*“a hermeneutic in which we read and interpret Bonhoeffer with others, and in response and responsibility to others; perhaps even also against ourselves.”*

Once again, he recalls Bonhoeffer's concepts of 'the other' and 'the boundary' to emphasise his point.

Lastly, Vosloo turns to the need for a participatory hermeneutic. Here he notes Bonhoeffer's absolute active participation in his theology. A doing theology that urges readers to similarly participate. He highlights Beyers Naudé's reminder offered to the audience at the 1996 Bonhoeffer Conference in Cape Town, that Bonhoeffer was concerned with '*Who is Jesus Christ, for us today?*' and not simply just his own significance.

Vosloo lays great emphasis on the importance of "*participating in a theologically informed way in the concrete realities posed by our contexts*".

Vosloo concludes with the following:

*“... I would like to argue that Bonhoeffer's interpretation in South Africa should continue to learn from Bonhoeffer interpretation during the struggle against apartheid, while at the same time acknowledges that the new challenges require not a mere repetition of insights from the past, but a fresh engagement with Bonhoeffer's life and thought.”*

In this paper, Vosloo states that Bonhoeffer's life, theology and resistance has provided South Africans with an example of a response to an unjust government. He however lays emphasis on the fact that any individual's interpretation and understanding of Bonhoeffer's resistance is guided by their position. When orientating the reception of Bonhoeffer, and his chosen path of resistance, in South

Africa through the years, Vosloo highlights Bonhoeffer's courage, wisdom and endurance. According to Vosloo, one of the greatest facets that Bonhoeffer's actions of resistance has presented humankind with is the necessity to move towards a participatory hermeneutic. Bonhoeffer urges his interpreters of his life and theology and certainly his resistance to partake in their reality.

Vosloo also presents an interesting angle on a valuable South African interpretation of Bonhoeffer's resistance of Hitler in his paper titled '*Bonhoeffer, leadership and a call for new authority: A South African theological perspective*'.

He turns to Bonhoeffer's radio address, mentioned earlier in this discussion, stating that this address, within the time frame that it occurred,

*"bears testimony to Bonhoeffer's prophetic sensibility and his ability to respond theologically to the challenges posed by the moment".*

Vosloo's above mentioned call for a 'responsible historical hermeneutic' echoes through this paper as well. He describes Bonhoeffer's address as exhibiting his ability to read the signs of the times and yet, also proves an interesting text to engage with regarding current challenges presently face by society as a whole.

He presents two very interesting events that have occurred in the recent past in South Africa. Both concerned with a specific section of South African youth's perceptions of leadership.

The first example comes out of a mostly younger Afrikaner generation. The famed 'De La Rey' song, calling on old General De La Rey, who fought in the Anglo-Boer war, to come and 'lead the boers'. Here Vosloo highlights the apparent longing for a

leader amongst the youth concerned. He also notes that it presents “*a strong commitment to the person and the cause of the leader*”.

Vosloo then uses another case to prove his point. He exemplifies the antics of the previous ANC Youth League Leader, Julius Malema and refers here to Malema’s proclamation of willingness to kill in the name of President Jacob Zuma. These statements would later be contrasted with Malema’s campaign to rid the ANC of Jacob Zuma. Malema has since been expelled from the ANC. According to Vosloo, the ensuing reaction signifies “*important shifts with regard to the concept of authority and leadership among a significant part of South Africa’s younger generation.*”

After providing his reader with a summary and explanation of Bonhoeffer’s radio address, Vosloo summarises Bonhoeffer’s warning in two parts: the leader is warned not to exploit his/her authority, and the people are warned against transferring their responsibility to an idealized leader. It is here that Vosloo embarks on an inquiry into an adequate theological response to a new call for authority. He describes this ‘new call for leadership and authority’ as possibly double-barrelled in that it is could be a flight response from authority that fails to deal sufficiently with questions of identity, as well as an air of tranquil acceptance of promises of easy solutions brought on by the vulnerability established by the vast social and economic problems facing South Africa, creating what he calls “*a state of disillusionment*”.

He proceeds by outlining three aspects of Bonhoeffer’s theological thought, present in his radio address, which Vosloo argues to be valuable within the discussion of a call for a new authority in South Africa.

Firstly, he focuses on the relation between authority and responsibility. Here a warning is issued; Vosloo recalls Bonhoeffer’s adamant cautionary notice that in the

move from a lack of authority, to a call for a new authority, responsibility is easily transferred to the new idealized and idolized leader. Vosloo introduces the reader to Bonhoeffer's concept of '*Stellvertretung*', where responsibility is based on vicarious representative action. He presents the following words from Bonhoeffer's address:

*"[a leader must lead his followers] ... towards a responsibility to the orders of life, a responsibility to father, teacher, judge, state".*

Secondly, he discusses the relation between the individual and community. Vosloo here highlights Bonhoeffer's remark that a new call for authority arises out of a younger generation's experience of the lack of significance of the concepts of individual and real community. Here, Vosloo heads Bonhoeffer's warning that this position easily leads to a vulnerability to new forms of;

*"... totalizing discourse resulting in individuals forfeiting their individual rights and responsibilities in the wake of the leader's rhetoric. In a situation in which a call for new authority and leadership becomes even stronger, Christians and churches can also succumb to the temptation of bracketing their prophetic critique in the name of security, patriotism and survival".*

Vosloo describes Bonhoeffer's life and work, in the light of a call for new authority, as a challenge to both isolated individualism as well as the romanticized concept of community.

Lastly, he explains the importance of the relationship between penultimate and ultimate authority. Here Vosloo points to Bonhoeffer's focus on the responsibility of the leader to communicate the boundaries of his authority, ensuring that he does not become an idol and that his followers are mindful to their responsibilities. This type of

service, however, can only exist within the light of God, who holds all authority. Vosloo states that Bonhoeffer places emphasis on the authority of the Word.

Vosloo's article provides a clear perspective on Bonhoeffer's resistance of Hitler. Bonhoeffer's commitment to his ultimate leader, God, and his need to participate in the reality of the world under the authority of God provides motivation for his steadfast resistance of the Third Reich and Hitler as leader. Vosloo highlights that Bonhoeffer conceptualises a leader as one who moves his followers "*towards a responsibility to the orders of life*". Thus Bonhoeffer's resistance might be viewed as an acting out of what he deemed his responsibility that he was moved towards by God, the supreme leader and authority of all the earth. Vosloo attains that it is this concept of penultimate authority under the ultimate authority of God that has lead Christians in the past to resist unjust execution of authority, as was Bonhoeffer's case in Germany. Hitler's selfish and inhumane rule was interpreted by Bonhoeffer as in conflict with the responsibility of humankind on earth under the authority of God and thus Bonhoeffer chose to participate in his reality and act in resistance to the Third Reich.

### **Bonhoeffer's reflection on his struggle against injustice**

In conclusion, the one response of utmost importance is surely that of Bonhoeffer himself. While in prison, by means of a letter to Bethge, Bonhoeffer provides a reflection of his personal journey towards freedom by means of a poem (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001: 138)

## STATIONS ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

### **Discipline**

*If you set out to seek freedom, then learn above all things to govern your soul and your senses, for fear that your passions and longing may lead you away from the path you should follow. Chaste be your mind and your body, and both in subjection, obediently, steadfastly seeking the aim set before them; only through discipline may a man learn to be free.*

### **Action**

*Darling to do what is right, not what fancy may tell you, valiantly grasping occasions, not cravenly doubting – freedom comes only through deeds, not through thoughts taking wing.*

*Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action, trusting in God whose commandments you faithfully follow; freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.*

### **Suffering**

*A change has come indeed. Your hands, so strong and active, are bound; in helplessness now you see your action is ended; you sigh in relief, your cause committing to stronger hands; so now you may rest contented.*

*Only for one blissful moment could you draw near to touch freedom; then, that it might be perfected in glory, you gave it to God.*

## **Death**

*Come now, thou greatest of feasts on the journey to freedom eternal;  
death, cast aside all the burdensome chains, and demolish the walls of our  
temporal body, the walls of our souls that are blinded,  
so that at last we may see that which here remains hidden.  
Freedom, how long we have sought thee in discipline, action, and suffering;  
Dying, we now may behold thee revealed in the Lord."*

He then adds on and accompanying note:

*"Dear Eberhard,*

*I wrote these lines in a few hours this evening. They are quite unpolished, but  
they may perhaps please you and be something of a birthday present for you.*

*Your Bonhoeffer*

*I can see this morning that I shall again have to revise them completely. Still  
I'm sending them to you as they are, in the rough. I'm certainly no poet!"*

Here, Bonhoeffer identifies four stages to life in search of freedom. Four stages that can quite easily be drawn back to the chronological events that shaped his life and his resistance effort as well as his search for righteous living. These four stages supply the willing reader with a reflection on his life and chosen path, by Bonhoeffer himself.



The first stage highlights his formation, his development as a disciplined scholar of 'The Word'. His German heritage surely shows face here. To Bonhoeffer discipline is not merely an action, it's a path, a journey towards discovery of life and the unearthing of reality.

Frits de Lange presents an interesting text entitled '*Waiting for the Word: Bonhoeffer's 'Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger Bethge' and the Churches' Embarrassment in Speaking about God*' (1997).

De Lange notes here that, according to Bonhoeffer, it is through our listening to God that we are able to speak about God. Bonhoeffer believed that it is only from God that we can learn to speak about God.

De Lange writes the following:

*"Bonhoeffer had developed his own version of theology which creates room for a speaking God" (1997:14).*

The second stage speaks of action. In this phase discipline is mobilised. If disciplined life leads the believer to discover the existence of a way towards freedom, then action is the 'fight' for the existence of it. This might imply opposing any ideal or deed that stands opposed to freedom. Here Bonhoeffer's active resistance (both in the church and in the political sphere) finds its place.

He emphasises that freedom can only truly be realised through action and not simply through '*thoughts taking wing*'. This expresses his justification for the necessity of the actions he took as part of the conspiracy, as well as his involvement in the

assassination plans aimed at Hitler. This action is energised by God, once again affirming Bonhoeffer's belief that his actions were in line with the will of God in the war.

The poem then takes a sombre turn and enters the next stage: suffering. Although images of helplessness are created (*"Your hands so strong and active are bound"*), there is a strong positivity in which this phase is received. Bonhoeffer concludes with the following:

*"Only for one blissful moment could you draw near to touch freedom; then, that it might be perfected in glory, you gave it to God."*

Once again, this reflects Bonhoeffer's conviction that he was merely playing his part in the will of God for humankind and that freedom was never his achievement to obtain. His role was a mere speck of obedient, brave action in the tale of God's providence.

Within his discussion of the last stage, death, it is clear that Bonhoeffer sees his ultimate reward as the freedom of being released from the world. After having developed his person through discipline, put his disciplined belief into action and suffered the consequences as a result of a world that hold freedom as captive, he is able to taste the fruits of his labour, and be set free into the eternal reality of God's goodness by grace.

In the concluding pages of Mataxas' biography of Bonhoeffer he writes:

*"Bonhoeffer thought it plain duty of the Christian – and the privilege and honour - to suffer with those who suffered. He knew that it was a privilege to*

*be allowed by God to partake of the sufferings of the Jews who had died in this place before him” (Metaxas 2010:532).*

It is clear that Bonhoeffer didn't consider himself to be in a position where he had any other choice but do as he did, and willingly partake in a plot against the life of Adolf Hitler. His resistance was not a mere impulsive act but rather the embodiment of all that he stood for and all that his education, formation and life experience had built up to.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

# Diffusion of Innovation Theory: A Model for considering Bonhoeffer's resistance

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*"I have had the time to think and to pray about my situation and that of my nation and to have God's will for me clarified. I have come to the conclusion that I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. My brothers in the Confessing Synod wanted me to go. They may have been right in urging me to do so; but I was wrong in going. Such a decision each man must make for himself. Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security" (Bethge 2000:559, cf Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001:210)*

This quote, from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr in July 1939 gives early evidence to Bonhoeffer's convictions regarding Hitler and the Third Reich. Not only does it clearly point to resistance of the Third Reich, but importantly also to Bonhoeffer's connection with Germany. The previous chapters have laid out

Bonhoeffer's life, and placed this decision in context within it as well as considered his resistance and aimed at a move towards an understanding thereof.

As previously highlighted in Chapter Two, Rogers develops a paradigm for the evaluation of the social diffusion of an idea or innovation into a new social territory. He considers specifically the communication process involved. The aim of his paradigm is to present the sociological information surrounding the social diffusion of an idea or innovation in such a way as to be able to create an understanding of the subject in question's acceptance or rejection thereof.

The following section will aim to put Rogers' paradigm, into practice, in short, by using an adapted model to consider the diffusion of the conviction in the life of Bonhoeffer, which proclaimed Hitler's actions as unjust and in opposition to the will of God and guided him into resistance against the Third Reich.

## **Elements of Diffusion**

Rogers opens his discussion on the elements of diffusion with a powerful quote from Niccolò Machiavelli's *'The Prince'* (1988)

*"There is nothing more difficult to plant, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage that the creation of a new order of things...whenever his enemies have the ability to attack the innovator they do so with passion of partisans, while the others defend his sluggishly, so that the innovator and his party alike are vulnerable"* (2003:21, cf Machiavelli)

With this quote Rogers wishes to emphasise that getting a new idea or innovation adopted is often difficult. He also wants his reader to take note of the fact that often

an individual who accepts an idea or innovation might be strongly opposed by many, possibly even threatened with death. This was certainly the case for Bonhoeffer. His decision to resist the Third Reich and partake in a plot against Hitler's life led to his imprisonment and later to his execution, together with that of the other conspirators. This section will consider what path was followed for the diffusion of this idea that led to Bonhoeffer's acceptance thereof.

The first element presented by Rogers is the innovation, ideal or idea itself. The innovation or idea presented in the case of Bonhoeffer is threefold. Firstly, the Third Reich is seen as enemy to all that is good, secondly, Hitler is believed to be acting in direct opposition to the will of God and thus, lastly, there is a need for active resistance against the state, motivated by the belief that God willed this resistance.

Rogers considers the relative advantage that the specific innovation or idea possesses as the second element of diffusion. In other words, he considers the extent to which the innovation is observed as better than the ideal it replaces. To establish the relative advantage that this idea holds over one that it replaces, the idea that precedes it must first be identified. The best case as a preceding idea is presented by the contradictory of that which Bonhoeffer was convinced of, as this was the general conception in Germany as a result of Hitler's persuasive propaganda, portraying him as the leader sent by God to uplift Germany (Rasmussen 1972:37). John A. Moses provides supporting information that states that for a great majority of Germans, Hitler was in a sense a substitute for the Creator. Hitler played on the Lutheran ideology of the state as God's instrument on earth (Moses 2009:29).

Bonhoeffer, however, picked up on the shortcoming of this ideology, as Moses states:

*“Bonhoeffer was destined to restructure the predominant theological paradigm” (2009:30).*

Moses explains that this ‘*predominant theological paradigm*’ that he refers to was that of Bonhoeffer’s professors in Berlin, who were adamant in their understanding and refusal to question

*“... German imperial expansion as the nation’s destiny under God” (Moses 2009:31).*

Rogers then considers the extent to which an idea is observed as being consistent with the prevailing values and past experiences. Once again, there is a need to refer back to Bonhoeffer’s formation, while remembering the Christological centre of his being as established in Chapter Three. Moses notes that:

*“Bonhoeffer, as was his entire family, particularly his brother and brother-in-law, who were lawyers, was highly critical of the Nazi’s rejection of the constitution, their contempt for the law. And their brutal racialism” (2009:104).*

In Chapter Four, while discussing the motivations Bonhoeffer had for actively resisting the state, the connection between Bonhoeffer’s Christology and his concept of reality is drawn on. To Bonhoeffer, reality was participation in the will of God. All that is not for the active participation in this reality is therefore seen as conscious objectors of the will of God (Rasmussen 1972:37). Bonhoeffer’s convictions were so strong that he turned them into radical actions. Mataxas in his foreword presents

these powerful words from Bonhoeffer's lips, justifying his passionate life, and offering a window into his intriguing mind:

*"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."* (2010:6)

Thirdly, Rogers considers whether an innovation or ideal could be problematic to comprehend, and what effect this might have on the diffusion thereof. This ideology of Hitler in opposition to the will of God was not a clear truth to many, mainly because of Hitler's exceptional talent in drawing on German tradition and patriotism to advance his deceitful ideology. Bethge tells how men of great stature in the church (Bishop Ludwig Müller as example) were drawn into Hitler's persuasive hypnotic propaganda (Bethge 2000:204).

Bonhoeffer, however, as a result of his refusal to simply accept any information given to him without thorough consideration and reflection, was not easily fooled by Hitler or The Third Reich.

Rogers also highlights the importance of considering the extent to which the consequences of an ideology are perceptible for others. Only once the conspirator's plot was made public, shortly before their death, did the ideology become perceptible to a larger audience. Thus, it limited the acceptability potential of many fellow Germans. However, through Bonhoeffer's correspondence with Bethge, Bishop Bell and Niebuhr, as well as his work as a double agent before his arrest, a certain audience was able to observe the idea as lived out by Bonhoeffer, and were faced with the choice of acceptance or rejection. This was also true for the participants in the collective pastorates (Metaxas 2010:298-301).



Rogers then proposes that the communication system, time span and the preceding knowledge held by the individual relating to the innovation or idea be considered. It is important here to realise that, although external factors and communications played a vital role in the diffusion of the idea, a great part of it was formulated during the natural process of growth that Bonhoeffer underwent. This process of communication was also largely developed through Bonhoeffer's correspondence with other individuals that were faced with a similar choice of acceptance or rejection of this idea as it grew and developed with them as individuals. One example of this could be the fellow conspirators themselves. They were a group of individuals who themselves also accepted the idea of necessary resistance of Hitler, even though this went against the convictions of the greater majority of German citizens. Their personal decisions arguably also influence Bonhoeffer's decision.

Although Bonhoeffer only joined the conspirators in actively plotting against the State in 1938, the idea or innovation as stated above was developed long before this time. It is interesting here to relate the five stages presented by Rogers' to the four stages identified by Bonhoeffer in his poem '*Stations on the road to Freedom*'. Although not identical, there is a certain pattern that can be noted.

*"If you set out to seek freedom, then learn above all things to govern your soul and your senses."* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001: 138)

Knowledge occurs upon the event of the individual's exposure to the existence of the ideology, and thus leads to gained understanding of its functioning. This stage can be affected by socioeconomic characteristics, personality variables as well as communication behaviour.

As far as Bonhoeffer is concerned, his more favourable socioeconomic context set him available to have an earlier encounter with knowledge. Bonhoeffer was sent to a good school, enjoyed a privileged life and was able to attend a good university as well as spend time travelling (Bethge 2000:3-28).

*“Chaste be your mind and your body, and both in subjection, obediently, steadfastly seeking the aim set before them; only through discipline may a man learn to be free”* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001: 138)

When either a positive or poor attitude is formed by the individual towards the idea, persuasion occurs. The first true recording of this persuasion taking place would be found in 1933 with Bonhoeffer's sermon on the radio entitled '*The Younger generation's Changed Concept of the Führer*' (Bethge 2000:193) and later that year his articles '*The Church and the Jewish Question*' (Bethge 2000:203-212) and '*The Aryan Clause*' (Bethge 2000:234).

When the choice is made to either adopt or reject the ideology, the activity of decision making is present. Bonhoeffer's final adoption of the ideology is surely his return to Germany, as stated in his letter to Niebuhr:

*“Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative if either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make that choice in security.”*  
(Bethge 2000:565, cf Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001:210)

Upon the occurrence of the ideology turning to action, implementation takes place. Bonhoeffer's decision to actively participate in the resistance in the political sphere by joining the Abwehr indicates this occasion of implementation (Bethge 2000:606).

*"Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action, trusting in God whose commandments you faithfully follow; freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy."* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 8, 2001: 138)

The occurrence of conformation is marked by the individual's search for reinforcement of an idea, if exposed to conflicting messages about innovation.

Rogers places emphasis on the need to consider the social system that surrounds the individual in question. Rogers defines a '*Social System*' as:

*"... a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal"* (2003:23).

Bonhoeffer was certainly a participant in a number of social systems where the conceptualisation and diffusion of the ideology was greatly influenced by the ideologies and diffusion processes of others surrounding him. Regarding one of the commonly dominant social systems, the family, one can note that Bonhoeffer was close to the members of his family and it seems from the information available that, although his siblings were hesitant about accepting his chosen career path at first (Bethge 2000:22), the family as a whole shared a communal set of values, perspectives and convictions on life and their beloved country, Germany (Bethge 2000:4). Many of these convictions Bonhoeffer would foster till the day he passed away. There has previously already in Chapter Four been made mention of the great

influential figures in Bonhoeffer's life, a number of whom stemmed out of Bonhoeffer's own family.

At Union Theological Seminary in New York, Bonhoeffer's social system was dominated by three main characters: Reinhold Niebuhr, Frank Fisher and Paul Lehmann. These men helped Bonhoeffer to develop a truly social ethic and to mould his view of the church's responsibility in the world (Bethge 2000:115-122). Bonhoeffer's understanding of responsibility came to play an extremely important role in both his theology and his choice of action in resistance. Under the ultimate authority of God, Bonhoeffer orientated his responsibility on earth, and participated in his reality, guided by this responsibility he believed was bestowed on him as one who knew God.

The Pastors Emergency League also played influential role in Bonhoeffer's ultimate decision. The creation of this league was the initial step toward the creation of the confessing Church. Within this circle of over six thousand pastors, Bonhoeffer's idea received acceptance by his peers (Metaxas 2010:188).

Later in his life, Finkenwalde offered Bonhoeffer the opportunity to express his theological talent in a great way. Bethge, who was a student of Bonhoeffer's at Finkenwalde comments that:

*"It was a delight to him to confirm young theologians in their calling in the hard pressed Church and to share with them, not only his gifts, but everything he possessed"* (Bethge 2000:341).

As mentioned before, Bonhoeffer's fellow conspirators' personal decisions had a great influence on that of Bonhoeffer. Concerning the idea being considered here,

this circle is the one in which Bonhoeffer received the greatest acceptance and affirmation of his idea. The conspirators consisted even of a few of his family member as well. Although Bonhoeffer was the only theologian in the group, they all seemed to have the same vision and idea in mind (Bethge 2000:606).

At Tegel prison, Metaxas explains that Bonhoeffer's relation to Paul von Hase attained him a certain level of favour. The guards, who were often also not fond of the Nazi's, revered the pastor and his kind and gentle manner added to the persuasion (Metaxas 2010:448). Here, Bonhoeffer's idea was accepted by the most unlikely of men, the very guards securing his cell. It is also while in prison at Tegel and finally in captivity at Flossenbürg where Bonhoeffer faced his thoughts in isolation and was forced to come to terms with his actions. However, it is here where Bonhoeffer wrote most of his work within which justification of his actions are presented.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the model presented by Rogers for understanding the diffusion of innovations or ideologies sets available an interesting tool for considering the social atmosphere and contributing factors to decisions made and paths chosen by individuals, or even groups.

This module grants a well-structured framework as one possible tool within which to lay out Bonhoeffer's journey towards acceptance and development of the ideology that drove his action in resistance against the rule of The Third Reich and Adolf Hitler.

The model is easily adaptable and forces a consideration of a great variety of possible influences on the individual or social group in question. A comparative study could also have been done with the counter idea as the subject, considering why Bonhoeffer did not accept The Third Reich as a valid agent in the furthering of the will of God on earth. This module possesses space for the inclusion of circumstantial deviances, as well as adaptation to suit a great variety of fields and subjects.

Although this study only presented a brief example of the applicability of this module for the use in theology, it certainly points to greater possibilities. Rogers's well-presented structure creates an easy reference point for a study concerning the acceptance and development of a specific ideology or innovation.

# CONCLUSION

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After the course followed so far in this thesis, what do we then understand of Bonhoeffer's resistance? Bonhoeffer's colourful life story has presented a tale of a boy from a privileged, academically strong background that ventured into the world where he was shaped into a theologian of reality. From his early scholarly days, impressing his Professors with his keen academic excellence, through his years as a young theologian exploring the world and what it had to offer, up to his darker days filled with troubled thoughts and earnest endearment – Bonhoeffer's theology ran parallel with his life's tale. His sociological struggles were guided by his theological convictions.

This remarkable theologian's resistance was a persistent struggle against the abuse of power and the unjust reality that faced Germany. As apparent from his radio address on 30 January 1933, Bonhoeffer was a visionary, a man of wisdom who read the signs of the times – taking head of persuasive philosophies selling cunning ideals. He attributes this to his determined listening for the Word of God as a guiding force for the realisation of the will of God in the world.

Bonhoeffer's life, theology and witness was shaped by a number of key figures that he shared a part of his life with. These include Julie (Tafel) Bonhoeffer, Paula (von Hase) Bonhoeffer, Sabine (Bonhoeffer) Leibholz, Karl Bath, Reinhold Niebuhr, Mahatma Gandhi, Bishop Bell of Chichester, Frank Fisher ... to name but a few. His relationships with these individuals tell significant tales of Bonhoeffer's formation as theologian, thinker and ultimately resistor.

One factor of Bonhoeffer's theology and resistance that cannot be denied, is its intrinsically and deep Christocentric roots. As Rasmussen describes Bonhoeffer's resistance:

*"The existential playing out of Christological themes. Changes and shifts his Christology, where at the same time, changes and shifts the character of his resistance" (1972:15).*

The moral code of Bonhoeffer's resistance is easy to trace throughout the witness he offered, allowing readers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to reflect on his life and actions with a stern concept of his development as a theologian, thinker and individual – all leading in turn to the end point of his life and climax of his tale.

As mentioned before, this study was in no means aimed at offering a critique or appraisal of Bonhoeffer's actions, but focused rather on an attempt to lay out his path of resistance as presented in an array of accredited sources in a venture to move towards understanding Bonhoeffer's choices and convictions that he lived out so strongly.

His life story, through the ink of family friend Eberhard Bethge and also presented in other biographies (such as that of Schlingensiepen and Mataxas), tells of a joyful spirit, a traveller, an academic, a teacher, a leader, a friend, a lover and an objector to injustice. Considering all the information presented and discussed above regarding Bonhoeffer's life, theology and writings, it is unavoidable to note the imperative role played by the formation he had undergone in the last few years of his life, in other words, his path of resistance and the consequences that followed, in his story as a theologian as a whole.



A few, not necessarily opposing, titles have been given to Bonhoeffer in later years that each suggest their own understanding of Bonhoeffer's life in resistance to the Nazi regime in Germany and the oppression it brought. These include the likes of Theologian of Reality (Andre Dumas); Protestant Saint (Steven R. Haynes) and Reluctant Revolutionary (John A. Moses).

In conclusion, although without a risen Bonhoeffer standing in front of us telling the tale of his mind's journey and offering the details of his own positions and deeds, no individual can be as arrogant as to believe that they understand Bonhoeffer's conscious resistance in full. However, we are able to review his life of passion, his search for peace, his honest theology and his desire to act for those who cannot act for themselves and track the path of his formation from a small German boy in a big family, to a great force in a re-occurring struggle, the struggle against injustice and towards the will of God for the world.

Until the day that the Lord returns we shall not be free of injustice or free of the responsibility of countering it. Thus, if we can take only but one thing from the life of a man who offered it all in the hope of unchaining the innocent, let it be these words:

*"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its apologia for the weak. I feel that Christianity is rather doing too little in showing these points than too much. Christianity has adjusted itself to the worship of power. It should give much more offence, more shock to the world, than it is doing. Christianity should take a much more definite stand for the weak than to consider the potential moral right of the strong"* (Bonhoeffer, DBWE Vol 13, 2007:403).

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